

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 20, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Portsmouth, New Hampshire)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF LETTERS FROM THE PRESIDENT TO
SENATOR HERMAN TALMADGE &) REP. TOM FOLEY

February 19, 1976

Dear Senator Talmadge: (Congressman Foley)

I am deeply concerned by the failure of Congress to enact seriously needed changes in the Food Stamp program.

Last October I sent to Congress legislation to reform the Food Stamp program. My proposals were designed both to concentrate benefits on those truly in need and to correct the abuses and inequities of the current program. Under my plan, 24% of the participants would receive increased benefits. This represents nearly 5 million of our neediest citizens with incomes below the poverty level. At the same time, overall program costs would be reduced by \$1.2 billion because most abuses would be eliminated and those with incomes well above the poverty level would no longer be eligible.

As you know, the Food Stamp appropriation passed by Congress in December clearly anticipated implementation of substantial reform. Indeed, that appropriation bill contained the assumption that reform would take place promptly and therefore the amounts provided to pay program benefits were reduced accordingly. Without action it is clear that the funds appropriated will not be adequate to meet the costs of the program. But no action has yet been taken by Congress to implement real reform. Each day that goes by without enactment of the reforms which I have proposed costs the taxpayers more than \$3.25 million.

My budget anticipated legislative reform action by February 1, 1976. We have passed that date and time is running out.

While statutory changes by the Congress would be the most desirable course of action, we can no longer afford to wait. Since the Congress has not acted, there are only two courses open to me: to ask for more funds to continue the program as it is, or to direct the Secretary of Agriculture to proceed administratively to reform the program through changes in regulations.

The first course is unacceptable to me because I believe the taxpayers have waited far too long for reform of this program. Therefore, since the Congress has not enacted Food Stamp reform, I have directed the Secretary of Agriculture to issue regulations which will set in motion the reforms needed to eliminate abuses, control costs and concentrate benefits on those truly in need.

Sincerely,

GERALD R. FORD