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Wolf Administration Improves Access to Pennsylvania Senior Food Box Program, Encourages Enrollment

Phoenixville, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Aging Secretary Robert Torres today joined seniors at Kings Terrace to announce steps to increase access to Pennsylvania’s Senior Food Boxes, a supplemental food program available free to lower income seniors. Giving the program a new name and removing proof of income requirements are among the barriers to participation the state is removing, with the goal of encouraging seniors to take advantage of the program.

Formally known as Commodity Supplemental Food Program, the program previously required seniors to provide documented proof of their income when they applied to receive a food box. The new procedure requires only a statement of income.

“We want to take hunger off the table for Pennsylvania’s seniors. They shouldn’t be worrying about whether to eat or pay for utilities and prescriptions,” said Redding. “They’ve supported their families or communities for a lifetime, and we want to support them now.

“This is why we’ve removed income verification as a requirement for the Senior Food Box, we want it to be as easy as possible to receive. So now, just indicate on the application form that you are eligible for help and you’ll receive it,” added Redding.

The Pennsylvania Senior Food Box is a product of the federally funded Commodity Supplemental Food Program. It works to improve the health of low-income seniors by providing a supplement to groceries of a variety of nutritious, shelf-stable products including shelf-stable fluid milk, juice, ready-to-eat cereal, rice, pasta, dry beans, peanut butter, canned meat, poultry, or fish, and canned fruits and vegetables. The Senior Food Box is a perfect supplement to other food assistance programs in Pennsylvania such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Pennsylvania Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides seniors with fresh, Pennsylvania-grown fruits and vegetables from summer through fall.

More than 300,000 Pennsylvania seniors are eligible for the Pennsylvania Senior Food Box, but only about 35,000 are enrolled to receive it this year. Seniors often face barriers to access for food assistance programs such as mobility, technology, and stigma. This food box program aims to overcome those barriers by being available for drop off or drive through in addition to pick up and, now, by reducing stigma and red tape with the removal of income verification requirements.

“Supporting older adults with the nutritious foods they need requires us to understand the challenges they face in their daily lives and provide options to overcome these challenges. We want seniors to have sufficient food and a stable meal routine that enables good health, independence and a positive quality of life,” said Aging Secretary Robert Torres. “I am pleased

to support the Department of Agriculture's efforts to make this important food assistance program more accessible, and I urge eligible seniors to take advantage of it through the many options available."

Food insecurity and hunger can have harmful impacts on the health and well-being of older adults. Poor food intake can cause nutrition deficiencies that increase disease risk or worsen existing conditions. Consuming fewer calories and nutrients can also decrease independence and the ability to remain home without assistance.

State Senator Carolyn Comitta, member of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and supporter of the Chester County Food Bank, joined Redding and Torres at Kings Terrace.

"It's vital that senior citizens can easily access nutritious food to help ensure their health, well-being, independence, and happiness," said Comitta. "This program is another tool we have to combat hunger among seniors. Seniors should know that food boxes are readily available and safely accessible in their communities."

Pennsylvania's Senior Food Box Program is administered on behalf of the Department of Agriculture by Hunger-Free Pennsylvania through their network of 17 food banks serving all 67 counties. Once signed up, eligible seniors can choose to receive their monthly box via pick up, drive-through, or delivery from a program partner including senior apartment complexes, senior community centers, and food pantries.

"Seniors are the greatest generation. They survived the Great Depression of the '30's, World War II, and the Korean War," said executive director of Hunter-Free Pennsylvania Sheila Christopher. "Now, hundreds of thousands find themselves without enough food on their table. The PA Senior Food Box is available to help. Help us help them."

The Senior Food Box is available for anyone age 60 or above whose household income is at or below 130 percent of the U.S. poverty level. That totals \$16,744 annually for a household of one, or \$22,646 for a household of two.

To apply, seniors may call 800-468-2433 to be directed to the regional food bank distributing the Senior Food Box in their county. Or go online at agriculture.pa.gov/seniorfoodbox and fill out the [Senior Food Box Application Form](#).

Note: Photo and video available at pacast.com.

MEDIA CONTACT: Shannon Powers, shpowers@pa.gov

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