*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Chris Magee. I’m the data analytics manager for LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.”

The purpose of this report was to provide information on the Department of Children and Family Services’ administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – or SNAP – and to identify potential areas for efficiency improvements.

We conducted this review in response to House Resolution 248 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session, which asked the Legislative Auditor’s office to conduct an efficiency audit of SNAP.

SNAP participants must meet various eligibility criteria, including those related to income, resources, and residency. Applicants must submit documents to support that they meet the criteria for the program and complete an interview to verify their information and answer additional questions.

Once a participant is approved for SNAP, benefits are automatically issued every month they are approved to receive benefits until the SNAP case is closed.

We found that most SNAP cases were closed because of non-financial procedural reasons, and most participants who lost benefits began receiving them again within three months.

During federal fiscal years 2018 through 2022, 81.1 percent of closed SNAP cases were closed for non-financial procedural reasons. From January 2019 through February 2020, 59.5 percent of the closed cases were churned, meaning they were reopened within 90 days of closure.

The Department of Children and Family Services – or DCFS – reviews a percentage of SNAP cases for quality control – or QC – purposes. We found that the percentage of SNAP cases DCFS reviewed that had errors increased from federal fiscal years 2018 through 2022.

In addition, while DCFS’ error rates were lower than or near the national average in federal fiscal years 2018 and 2019, error rates overall increased from federal fiscal years 2018 through 2021.

The percentage of active SNAP cases reviewed for QC that had errors rose from 4.4 percent in federal fiscal year 2018 to 44.9 percent in 2022, while the percentage of negative SNAP cases reviewed for QC that had errors increased from 33.2 percent to 59.8 percent.

Active cases are households participating in SNAP; negative cases are households for which participation has been denied, suspended, or terminated. According to DCFS, the number of errors rose because of staffing shortages, the number of Disaster SNAP – or DSNAP – operations that agency staff responded to between September 2020 and November 2021, and multiple COVID-19 flexibilities.

We also found that while DCFS has a process to track SNAP complaints, data issues limit the agency’s ability to efficiently use the information to identify trends or to determine if the complaints are valid and resolved in a timely manner.

Finally, although DCFS’ Customer Service Call Center vendor has not consistently met its contractual obligations, agency officials stated they have worked with the vendor to address compliance issues.

For example, the contract requires that the average time to answer calls should not exceed six minutes. However, we found that in seven of fourteen months, the average time to answer exceeded six minutes, ranging from a high of 50 minutes and 49 seconds in September 2021 to a low of nine seconds in October 2022.

As a result of our report, we developed four recommendations.

We recommended that DCFS ensure uniform, accurate, and complete information is entered into the agency’s complaint tracking systems to help improve its administration of SNAP.

We also recommended thatDCFS routinely use complaint data to help improve its administration of SNAP.

In addition, we recommended that DCFS ensure its customer service vendor meets contract requirements, including performance measures, report submissions, and access to data and that DCFS use the customer service data to help improve its administration of SNAP.

As part of its response, which is included in the report as Appendix A, the Department of Children and Family Services agreed with all four of our recommendations.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*