

Why We Conducted This Review

We evaluated the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) within the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to provide information and to identify potential areas to improve efficiency. We conducted this review in response to House Resolution 248 of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session, which requested the Louisiana Legislative Auditor's office conduct an efficiency audit of SNAP. The United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) manages SNAP at the federal level. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, FNS approved a range of "flexibilities" to assist states in ensuring access to SNAP was maintained for participants despite rising caseloads and challenges associated with the pandemic.

What We Found

- **Most SNAP cases are closed for non-financial procedural reasons instead of SNAP participants not meeting financial eligibility requirements such as too much income, and most SNAP participants who lose benefits begin receiving them again within three months.** During federal fiscal years 2018 through 2022, 1,202,816 (81.1%) of 1,482,998 SNAP cases that closed were closed for non-financial procedural reasons, and from January 2019 through February 2020, 61,628 (59.5%) of 103,510 cases closed were churned, meaning they were re-opened within 90 days of closure.
- **The percent of SNAP cases DCFS reviewed for Quality Control (QC) 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 increased from federal fiscal years 2018 through 2021.** The percent of active SNAP cases reviewed for QC that had errors increased from 34 (4.4%) of 773 cases in federal fiscal year 2018 to 283 (44.9%) of 630 cases in 2022, while the percent of negative SNAP cases reviewed for QC that had errors increased from 242 (33.2%) of 728 cases in federal fiscal year 2018 to 394 (59.8%) of 659 cases in 2022. According to DCFS, these errors increased due to staffing shortages, the number of Disaster SNAP (DSNAP) operations that DCFS staff responded to between September 2020 and November 2021, and multiple COVID-19 flexibilities.

SNAP (previously known as the "Food Stamps" program) was authorized by the United States Congress in 1964 to alleviate hunger and malnutrition by allowing low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet by increasing food purchasing power for eligible households.

Active cases are households participating in SNAP. Reviews are conducted to determine if households are eligible and receiving the correct allotment amounts.

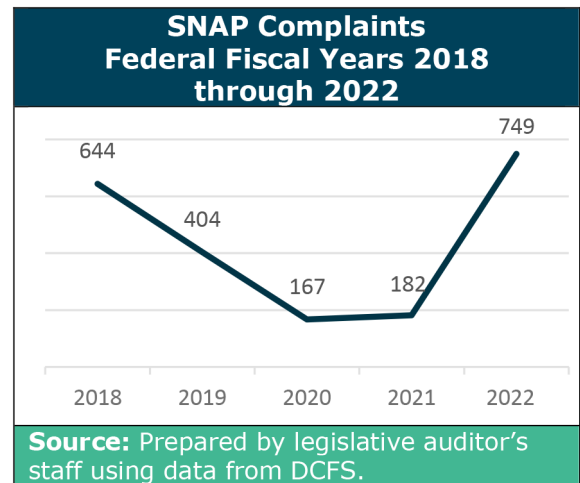
Negative cases are households for which participation was denied, suspended, or terminated. Reviews are conducted to determine whether decisions to deny, suspend, or terminate cases were correct; and to review the notices DCFS sends to participants.

What We Found (Cont.)

SNAP Error Rates*				
Federal Fiscal Years 2018 through 2021				
	2018	2019	2020	2021
Payment Error Rate (PER) for Active Cases				
Louisiana	2.7%	3.8%	7.8%	8.8%
National	6.8%	7.4%	NA	NA
Case and Procedural Error Rate (CAPER) for Negative Cases				
Louisiana	33.2%	34.7%	33.0%	58.3%
National	37.7%	34.0%	NA	NA

* According to FNS, it will not calculate official error rates for FFY 2020 or 2021 due to a lack of QC data caused by flexibilities that allowed states to suspend QC activities due to COVID-19; the error rates for those years are unofficial state reported error rates. We analyzed error rates through 2021 because FNS had not published error rates for FFY22 at the time of our analysis.
Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using data from DCFS and FNS.

- While DCFS has a process to track complaints it receives about SNAP, issues with the data limit DCFS' ability to efficiently use it to identify trends or to determine if complaints are valid and resolved timely.** For example, while there is a field for inputting if a complaint is valid or invalid, 760 (35.4%) of 2,146 complaint records were blank in this field. During federal fiscal years 2018 through 2022, there were an average of 846,525 SNAP participants each year and during that time, DCFS received at least 2,146 complaints related to SNAP.



- Although DCFS' Customer Service Call Center (CSC) vendor has not consistently met its contractual obligations, DCFS stated that it has worked with them to address compliance issues.** For example, the contract requires that the average speed to answer calls should not exceed six minutes. However, we found that in seven (50.0%) of 14 months, the average speed to answer exceeded six minutes. The average speed ranged from a high of 50 minutes and 49 seconds in September 2021 to a low of nine seconds in October 2022.