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**FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES CERTIFICATION**  
**GENERAL PROCEDURES & REQUIREMENTS**  
**Complaint Procedures**

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**FNS 125 Complaint Procedures**  
**Change #1-2014**  
**April 1, 2014**

**125.01 COMPLAINT PROCEDURES**

There are three distinct procedures for filing and processing complaints regarding operation of Food and Nutrition Services. The nature of the complaint must be examined in order to determine which of the three systems is appropriate for the particular complaint. The three systems are Fair Hearings, Discrimination, and State Complaint Procedures.

Persons or agencies desiring program information whose requests **cannot be satisfied** at the local or State level may contact the FNS Regional Office at:

USDA/Food and Nutrition Service  
Southeast Region  
61 Forsyth St. S.W.  
Room 8T36  
Atlanta, GA 30303-8906

**125.02 FAIR HEARINGS**

Complaints concerning eligibility for the program and benefit levels are handled according to procedures in Section 700, Hearings. Complaints concerning the establishment of or the amount of inadvertent household or agency error claims and complaints concerning the amount of Intentional Program Violation (IPV) claims are also handled under fair hearing procedures. Complaints concerning the establishment of an IPV claim are not handled under fair hearing procedures, as IPV claims result from either prosecution through the court system or an administrative disqualification hearing.

**125.03 DISCRIMINATION**

People who believe that they have been subject to discrimination as specified in Section 120.01 may file a complaint with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Complaints alleging discrimination in any aspect of program administration, including, but not limited to, the certification of a household, the issuance of Food and Nutrition Services, the conduct of a fair hearing, or the conduct of any other program service on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, or political beliefs are made to the United States Department of Agriculture. The county department explains the complaint system to each individual who expresses an interest in filing a discrimination complaint and advises the individual of the right to file a complaint. Persons who believe they have been subject to discrimination may file a written complaint with USDA at the following address:

USDA, Director  
Office of Civil Rights  
200 Independence Avenue SW Room 515-F  
Washington, DC 20201-0004  
Phone: 202-619-0403 (voice) or 800-537-7697 (TTY)

- A. A complaint must be filed no later than 180 days from the alleged discrimination. However, the Secretary of FNS may extend the time of filing.

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- B. In the event an individual verbally alleges that a discriminatory act has been committed but the individual is unable or is reluctant to put the allegations in writing, the USDA employee receiving the complaint will do so. The following information is requested during the complaint process.
1. Name, address, and telephone number or other means of contacting the person alleging discrimination.
  2. Location and name of the organization or office which is accused of discriminatory practices.
  3. The nature of the incident, action, or the aspect of program administration that led the person to allege discrimination.
  4. The reason for the alleged discrimination (race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, or political belief).
  5. Names, titles (if appropriate), and addresses of persons who may have knowledge of the alleged discriminatory act.
  6. The date(s) on which the discriminatory actions occurred.
- C. Complaints are accepted by the USDA, even if the information specified in 125.03B is not complete. However, investigations are conducted only if the information concerning B. 2., 3., and 4. is provided.

The USDA determines the action to be taken on individual complaints in accordance with current laws and regulations.

**125.04 STATE COMPLAINT PROCEDURES**

The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services maintains a system for handling complaints filed by participants, potential participants, or other concerned individuals or groups. Complaints regarding such areas as processing standards, general service to participants or potential participants, and complaints in areas not covered by fair hearing or discrimination complaint procedures are processed in the following manner.

- A. The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services ensures that each reported incident is studied, resolved in the appropriate manner, and corrective or remedial action taken when warranted. The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services notifies the complainant of the disposition of the complaint within a reasonable period of time.
- B. Records of complaints received and their disposition are filed and checked periodically for possible patterns of deficiencies. When appropriate, any identification of causal factors is included in the State Corrective Action Plan.
- C. Forward complaints of discrimination, including the information in Section 125.03B, to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services within five calendar days at the address below. This information will then be sent to USDA.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Social Services  
Carlotta Dixon, MHS, CPM  
Program Compliance Section Chief  
Equal Employment Opportunity Title VI Civil Rights Coordinator  
2401 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, N.C. 27699-2401

**NOTE:** Complaints regarding such areas as processing standards and service to participants are generally handled under this complaint procedure.