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Attorney General Brown Joins Lawsuit Challenging Trump Administration's Illegal Demands that States Hand Over Sensitive Personal Data of SNAP Recipients

Move Marks Latest Attempt by Trump Administration to Collect Unrelated, Protected Data to Fuel Mass Deportation Machine

BALTIMORE, MD (July 28, 2025) – Attorney General Anthony G. Brown today, as part of a coalition of 21 attorneys general and the Governor of Kentucky, filed a lawsuit challenging the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) demand that states turn over personal and sensitive information about millions of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. SNAP is a federally funded, state-administered program providing billions of dollars in food assistance to tens of millions of low-income families across the country.

SNAP applicants provide their private information on the understanding, backed by long-standing state and federal laws, that their information will not be used for unrelated purposes. USDA has suggested that it could withhold administrative funding for the program if states fail to comply – effectively forcing states to choose between protecting their residents' privacy and providing critical nutrition assistance to those in need. Maryland receives roughly $1.7 billion per year for the program, and any delay in that funding could be catastrophic for the state and the residents who rely on SNAP to put food on the table. In a lawsuit filed today in the Northern District of California, Attorney General Brown and the coalition argue that this demand violates multiple federal privacy laws and the U.S. Constitution.

For 60 years, Maryland and other states have administered SNAP, which serves as an essential safety net for millions of low-income Americans by providing credits that can be used to purchase groceries for themselves and their family members. In those sixty years, the federal government and state agencies have worked together to build a robust process for ensuring that only eligible individuals receive benefits. In fact, the USDA itself has described SNAP as having "one of the most rigorous quality control systems in the federal government." Those systems do not, and have never, required that states turn over sensitive, personally identifying information about millions of Americans without any meaningful restrictions on how that information is used or shared with other agencies.

Yet in May 2025, USDA made an unprecedented demand that states turn over massive amounts of personal information on all SNAP applicants and recipients, including social security numbers and home addresses, dating back five years. Even a year's worth of SNAP recipient data contains sensitive, personal identifying information on tens of millions of individuals – including over 900,000 Maryland households. The federal government's stated justifications for its unprecedented data demands, to "prevent fraud and abuse," are directly contradicted by their own findings.

USDA's demand is part of a coordinated effort by the federal government to collect personal information on Americans from every possible source, to be used to advance President Trump's agenda. Since President Trump re-entered the White House in January, public reports indicate that federal officials are amassing huge databases of personal information on Americans and using that data for undisclosed purposes, including immigration enforcement. The Department of Homeland Security has already obtained troves of personal information from both the Internal Revenue Service and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, including private medical information and other personal details on Medicaid recipients, which Maryland has already challenged in court. USDA's attempts to collect data from states about SNAP applicants and recipients appear to be the next step in this campaign.

USDA's actions are unprecedented, threaten the privacy of millions of families, and ignore long-standing restrictions on the use and redisclosure of SNAP data. Both federal and state law prohibit Maryland from disclosing personally identifying SNAP data unless strictly necessary for the administration of the program, or in some other very limited situations. Those circumstances do not exist here. In today's lawsuit, Attorney General Brown and the coalition argue that these demands violate multiple federal privacy laws; fail to meet public-comment and other procedural requirements for this type of action; exceed USDA's statutory authority; and violate the Spending Clause. The coalition asks that the District Court declare the Trump administration's demands unlawful and block the administration from enforcing these demands.

In filing the lawsuit, Attorney General Brown joins the attorneys general of California, New York, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Delaware, Hawai'i, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin, as well as the State of Kentucky.

A copy of the complaint will be available here.

https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2025/072825.pdf