

**NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM
APPEAL PROCEDURES**

I. ACTIONS WHICH CAN BE APPEALED TO THE NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

1. In accordance with federal regulations governing Child Nutrition Programs (CNP), which establishes the minimum criteria for National School Lunch Program (NSLP) appeals, the New York State Education Department (SED) observes many of those standards as well as state agency standards and has established these appeal procedures to be followed when a NSLP School Food Authority (SFA) requests an appeal. SED reserves the right to adhere its appeal process to any subsequent amendments to federal regulations or state agency procedures at SED's discretion.

2. **NSLP appeals are only allowed for fiscal action determinations which includes a denial of all, or part of, a claim for reimbursement, reclaim or withholding of payment resulting from an administrative review conducted by SED under 7 CFR Part 210.18.** Decisions made by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) with respect to late claims under 7 CFR 210.8 are not appealable at the State Agency level.

***** **The standard of review is whether the State Agency's Notice of Action is arbitrary and capricious based upon the information and documentation the Sponsor provided prior to the Notice of Action.**

***** **The appellant has the burden of proof to show that the determination of the department was incorrect, arbitrary and capricious or in violation of program statutes, regulations and guidance.**

3. The School Food Authority's (SFA) authorized official will be advised in writing of the grounds for denial of all or part of a claim for reimbursement, reclaim or withholding of payment resulting from an administrative review conducted by SED under 7 CFR Part 210.18. The state agency notice of action shall be sent **by certified mail, return receipt (or the equivalent private delivery service), by facsimile, or by email to the SFA's authorized official recognized by SED at the last known mailing address, facsimile number or email address.** The notice of action shall also include a statement indicating that the SFA has the right to appeal the notice of action of the state agency.

4. **All Reimbursement holds will remain in effect during the appeal process.**

II. PROCEDURE FOR FILING AN APPEAL

1. All appeal requests must be postmarked by the U.S. Postal Service (or the equivalent private delivery service) or delivered to the CNP office **within 15 calendar days of receipt** of the state agency notice of action. **The notice of action is considered to be received when it is first delivered to the SFA's authorized official at the last known address by certified mail, return receipt (or the equivalent private delivery service), by facsimile, or by email.** If the 15th calendar day falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or federal holiday, request will be timely if it is

postmarked or delivered the next business day which is not a Saturday, Sunday or federal legal holiday. If the notice is undeliverable, it is considered to be received five days after being sent to the SFA's authorized official's last known mailing address, facsimile number, or email address. Nothing contained in this section is intended to extend the deadline for appeal requests beyond 15 calendar days of receipt of the notice of action. **Untimely appeals will not be considered and will be returned to the SFA.**

2. The appeal request **must clearly identify the state agency action being appealed and be signed by the SFA's authorized official or school administrator recognized by SED.** If the SFA has designated another person, consultant or agent to represent its appeal interests, the SFA must provide written authorization of the same. If the SFA has retained legal counsel, a letter of representation must accompany the appeal request. A photocopy of the state agency notice of action must accompany each appeal request.

3. The SFA has two appeal options. It can request a review of documentation upon submission of such documentation to the Impartial Hearing Officer (IHO) (**written appeal**) or it can request a **hearing** before the IHO, which is informal and will be held in NYSED's Albany Office. The SFA must **clearly state** in its appeal request which type of appeal it is seeking.

4. The SFA is required to refute the charges contained in the state agency notice of action by clearly stating its arguments and objections to the charges contained in the notice of action and provide documentation such as statutes, regulations and guidance supporting the SFA's arguments and objections. This is known as Discovery. **Additional documentation, including but not limited to CNP records, reports and documentation to support CNP operations, not previously provided at the time of a CNP review or as part of a final corrective action plan shall not be considered.** Such discovery shall be submitted with the SFA's appeal request, or the SFA must indicate in its appeal request that such documentation will be filed **with the IHO within 30 calendar days after the SFA received SED's notice of action.** **Failure of an SFA to respond** to the charges contained in the state agency notice of action and provide their arguments, objections and discovery within the specified timeframes shall result in the SFA being precluded from submitting those arguments, objections and discovery at hearing.

5. An SFA shall be afforded the opportunity to review any information obtained by the state agency upon which the notice of action was based by submitting such discovery requests to the IHO. However, information relating to the selection of the SFA for audit, investigation notes or other material which may reveal investigation techniques, material prepared for submission to the IHO in preparation for an appeal or confidential information need not be revealed. The SFA's and State Agency's arguments, information and discovery shall be provided **simultaneously** to each party in accordance with discovery deadlines established by the IHO. **Neither side is required to provide documentation and discovery prior to the simultaneous discovery deadlines established by the IHO.** Requests for rebuttal may be made at the IHO's discretion. Post hearing briefs are impermissible. Any new allegations, belated assertions or arguments in rebuttal documentation or at hearing that have not been previously advanced shall not be considered unless the IHO determines otherwise. Adjournment of discovery deadlines can be made at the request of either party.

6. All appeal requests must be sent to the following email or physical address:

**ATTN: Appeals Coordinator
The New York State Education Department**

III. ASSIGNMENT OF AN IMPARTIAL HEARING OFFICER AND SUBMISSION OF DOCUMENTATION

1. Upon receipt of an appeal request the CNP Appeals Coordinator will assign an IHO to decide the appeal. Decisions will be rendered in a timely manner **not exceeding 120** days from the date the CNP received the appeal request.
2. The IHO will immediately acknowledge the SFA's appeal and require the parties to submit documentation pursuant to the timeframes established by the IHO. In the acknowledgment letter, the IHO will seek approval from the parties to use facsimile or email throughout the appeal process. The IHO may schedule the hearing as part of the acknowledgment letter. If the acknowledgment letter scheduled a hearing, the parties may request an adjournment if needed. After receipt of the acknowledgment letter, the parties must immediately bring procedural concerns to the IHO's attention. **The SFA and the CNP must copy each other on all submissions.**

IV. HEARING

1. Pursuant to 7 CFR §210.18 (p), if the SFA requested a hearing, it should be **held within 45 days** from the date the IHO receives the request for review but not before the Sponsor's written documentation is received by the IHO. The hearing may be held at a later date upon request from either party or in the event of scheduling conflicts.
2. Pursuant to 7 CFR §210.18 (p), the IHO will provide the parties with **at least 10 day advance written notice** of the time, date and location of the hearing, sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, if the parties did not otherwise agree to the use of facsimile or email.
3. The parties may retain legal counsel or be represented by another person at the hearing. If the SFA has designated another person, consultant or agent to represent its appeal interests, the sponsor must provide written authorization of the same.
4. Failure of the SFA or SFA's representative to appear at a scheduled hearing shall constitute its waiver of the right to a personal appearance before the IHO. A representative of the state agency shall be allowed to attend the hearing to respond to the SFA's testimony and written information and to answer questions from the IHO.
5. The informal appeal procedures do not include motion practice. Stenographic transcripts are not required. The formal rules of civil procedure may not apply. The IHOs are not bound by the rules of evidence governing courts in New York State. IHOs have the discretion to include hearsay evidence that is relevant and determine witness credibility. Irrelevant and unduly repetitious testimony will be excluded. Post hearing briefs are impermissible.

V. THE HEARING OFFICER'S DECISION

1. The IHO shall make a decision to uphold, reverse, or modify the state agency's action based on a review of the documentation and information provided by the SFA and the state agency, and on program regulations. The IHO's determination is the final administrative determination to be afforded the SFA and is effective upon receipt by the SFA.

2. The IHO's written determination shall be sent to the SFA and to the state agency by certified mail, return receipt requested, by facsimile or by email **within 60 days** after the close of the hearing or **within 60 days after receipt** of the SFA's supporting documentation if no hearing is conducted unless good cause for delay can be demonstrated.