GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, ENERGY, AND FORESTRY
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February 23, 2012

Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

It is my understanding that as much as $4.5 million awarded for the Northern Mariana Islands Nutritional Assistance Program block grants from fiscal years 2006 to 2010 was never used by the Commonwealth Government and, as a result, has now been de-obligated by your Department.

To learn that these funds have been available at the same time that the Commonwealth Government has been cutting benefits, denying and delaying payments to eligible beneficiaries, and cutting the hours of administrative staff, leaving long waits for service, is difficult to comprehend. It is our nation's declared policy to safeguard low-income families in need. Yet we have let people go hungry, while funds were available to feed them.

You have been a good partner, responding to the need in the Northern Marianas and using your authority to raise the 2009 block grant by 13.6% in line with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. That increase maintained until last year, when you again responded to my requests for assistance, recommending to Congress an additional $1 million, which brought the block grant to $13.148 million for FY12. You set the condition, rightly, that this new money all go to benefits and none to administration.

I would ask you now to continue to provide for those in the Northern Marianas, who simply cannot adequately feed themselves and their families. Whatever the reason that led to the de-obligation, let us not penalize those who are truly hungry and need our assistance. Restore

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whatever funds may have been de-obligated. Again, condition that the money must be used solely for benefits. And consider that this situation might well have been avoided had the Northern Marianas been included in the national Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, which remains in your authority to initiate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

GREGORIOKILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress

cc: Honorable Kevin W. Concannon, Under Secretary