

# Conservative states criticize USDA probes to uncover fraud in SNAP

Blowback from Ohio and Georgia casts doubt on the credibility of USDA's anti-fraud narrative as the federal government scrutinizes the country's signature nutrition assistance program.

By **RACHEL SHIN**

07/23/2026 10:00 AM EDT

A Trump administration initiative to expose potential fraud in the nation's largest food aid program has sparked pushback from two Republican-led states, raising new doubts about how it's scrutinizing the signature \$100 billion safety net.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins has spent months campaigning against [“significant fraud”](#) in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program as part of a splashy public messaging effort among Republicans. She [repeats unconfirmed claims](#) that thousands of SNAP beneficiaries are driving Lamborghinis, Porsches and other luxury cars, and regularly [posts mugshots](#) of people arrested for alleged fraud.

But Ohio and Georgia — the first two states to get examined for potential fraud by the Agriculture Department's independent watchdog — said the agency's methods were “insufficient” and “incorrectly identified” errors, according to documents obtained by POLITICO.

While genuine scammers do target the SNAP system, former USDA officials said the department and its inspector general appear to be adopting a maximalist approach that often mischaracterizes routine administrative errors and proper payments as potential theft. So far, Ohio has successfully disputed USDA's initial estimate, landing at a figure tens of millions of dollars lower.

More than a dozen Democratic-led states are already [embroiled in lawsuits](#) with the federal government [over the states' refusal](#) to turn over sensitive personal data about SNAP participants. But with inspection results slated to be released for several more states — including Florida and Texas — the disagreements from Ohio and Georgia suggest the agency's work may uncover far less fraud than the administration claims.

“In terms of lumping everything under fraud, I've never seen it done the way it's being done right now,” said Alan Shannon, a former USDA employee who

worked as a SNAP payment accuracy specialist for more than two decades. “This is highly unusual, and it’s unusual that they would be doing [press] releases on it, and that they would be calling all of this fraud, particularly when that is incorrect language to be using.”

In a statement, USDA Inspector General John Walk said his office shares its preliminary conclusions with states before reconciling those findings based on additional evidence that might explain data that signals potential fraud, and that those figures are “part of the iterative process and would not represent OIG’s final conclusions.”

“Characterizing discussions held by OIG and the States as disagreements and disputes greatly mischaracterizes our routine processes,” Walk told POLITICO.

In Georgia and Ohio’s SNAP inspections, the inspector general’s initial methodology appeared to sweep up allowable benefit payments and routine administrative errors and then conflated them into a broader problem that did not necessarily exist, according to former department officials.

For example, when Walk’s office scrutinized Ohio children receiving SNAP benefits despite not having an adult also receiving benefits listed on their case, state officials noted in documents that “federal rules allow for children to receive benefits even if the parent is ineligible for various reasons like not meeting citizenship requirements.”

Ohio also pushed back on the USDA’s flag of a person over 110 years old as a potentially fraudulent aid recipient. Ohio replied that “there is no federal rule limiting the age a person can be to receive SNAP” and included a Social Security attachment showing that the person was still alive.

“Ohio disagrees with the preliminary findings of questioned costs in the amount of \$59,662,683,” the state said in a response to the OIG’s initial findings obtained by POLITICO. “The basis for Ohio’s disagreement is twofold — proper audit procedures were not followed, and 2) the specific data requested by OIG was insufficient and as a result does not accurately reflect Ohio’s administration of SNAP.”

The administration’s anti-fraud push has overlapped with SNAP enrollment falling by about 4.3 million people over the last year, [according to preliminary USDA data](#), after Republicans imposed tighter eligibility rules for the nutrition assistance program through their domestic policy law last summer.

“It concerns me when they’re potentially inflating the findings and undermining public trust in the programs,” said Stacy Dean, the former deputy undersecretary of USDA’s Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services division. “They’re there to enhance public trust in the programs by being that watchdog, but when they don’t take the time to check their work and to be sure of its accuracy, they can erode public confidence in these critical nutrition programs.”

A former USDA employee familiar with the evaluations and granted anonymity to discuss them, said that because initially OIG “didn’t go through [the Food and Nutrition Administration], which they do normally, they got all this data and then were claiming huge amounts of fraud, when it’s really because they didn’t understand the data they were looking at.”

Walk said in a statement that “as FNA is responsible for State oversight, FNA is included as part of the corrective action process.”

The former employee added that Ohio “flatly disagreed with all of the OIG findings, and gave pretty significant reasons why.”

Fraud does occur in federal food aid programs. In one recent example, two Minnesota men [pleaded guilty to federal charges](#) for their roles in a sprawling scheme centered on Feeding Our Future, a now-shuttered food security nonprofit. The two were found to have illicitly received more than \$10 million in federal child nutrition funds for millions of purported meals that were never served.

Walk [told Congress last month that](#) criminal organizations often use sophisticated scams to target vulnerabilities in the SNAP payment system: EBT card “skimming,” or theft from recipients’ magnetic strip cards; SNAP trafficking, in which retailers launder benefits for cash; and terminal cloning, in which criminals impersonate an authorized retailer to direct SNAP payments into their own bank accounts.

“I think it’s important to increase the consequences for fraud,” Walk said of SNAP fraud during [his November nomination hearing](#). “I think we can do more in terms of pursuing federal criminal prosecutions and making sure that we’re building the cases for the Department of Justice to go after those who commit fraud with taxpayer dollars.”

Yet private disputes between red states and the federal government complicate the portrayal of federal benefits abuse promoted by Rollins and Vice President JD Vance in [their anti-fraud campaign](#), which was codified into an official task force by the president in [a March executive order](#).

Although Walk's office is designed to operate independently from the Agriculture secretary, he [previously served as a senior adviser](#) to Rollins and worked in the White House legal office during President Donald Trump's first term. The inspector general's office said the evaluations began before Walk was sworn into office this year.

"The President was elected with a resounding mandate to eliminate runaway spending across the federal government — which includes ensuring that illegal aliens are not receiving benefits intended for American citizens," White House spokesperson Anna Kelly said in a statement.

Kelly referred questions about USDA's inspections to Walk's office. The Agriculture Department did not respond to a request for comment.

The inspector general's office ultimately revised its initial findings after both Ohio and Georgia responded with extensive lists of what the states described as inaccuracies and mistaken assumptions, according to the former employee.

However, Walk said his office will not change its methods for other state assessments.

In his statement, Walk said the inspector general's teams "meet extensively with each State throughout the engagement to ensure conclusions included in the final report are accurate" and applied "assumptions based on discussions with the States."