



**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
AMERICAN SAMOA GOVERNMENT**

PROCLAMATION

“DHSS CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF ASNAP FROM JULY 1994 TO JULY 2024”

WHEREAS, on June 12, 1991, Congressman Faleomavaega Eni Hunkin approved a proposal from his Washington, DC Special Assistant, (Muavaefa’atasi) John E. Suisala, to pursue the extension to American Samoa of the Food Stamp Program and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, Children (WIC) and negotiate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to tailor the Food Stamp Program to benefit only our low-income elderly, blind, and disabled individuals as well as other modifications appropriate for American Samoa. Although significant progress was made, local opposition to extending federal welfare programs to the Territory prevented any further progress; and

WHEREAS, on January 21, 1993, after his election to a second term, Governor A. P. Lutali met with Congressman Faleomavaega to inform him of his intention to pursue the same two programs that Congressman Faleomavaega wanted to introduce to American Samoa. They agreed to work together to extend to American Samoa a modified Food Stamp Program, and the WIC Program. Governor Lutali, who was in Washington, DC for the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, submitted a request that same day to USDA Secretary Mike Espy to extend a modified Food Stamp Program to American Samoa; and

WHEREAS, upon his return from Washington, DC, Governor Lutali established a task force to provide all the information and technical assistance needed for this purpose and designated (Muavaefa’atasi) John E. Suisala to be American Samoa’s chief negotiator with the federal government. The task force consisted of TAOA Director Fuiavailili Mata’u Taele, Governor’s Chief Legal Counsel Tuinei Tauivi, OPAD Director Mina Thompson, Governor’s Assistant for Administration Solagaliua Solaita, and Congressman Faleomavaega’s District Office Special Assistant, Dr. Oreta Crichton; and

WHEREAS, negotiations between the American Samoa Government (ASG) and USDA successfully established the **American Samoa Nutrition Assistance Program (ASNAP)** - the only modified and simplified Food Stamp Program in the nation to benefit only low-income elderly, blind, and disabled individuals. The first annual Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and ASG was signed in May 1994 by FNS Western Regional Administrator Sharon Levinson and Governor Lutali. The MOU established, governed, and funded the ASNAP in Fiscal Year 1994 for \$5.3 million. In June 1994, Governor Lutali appointed (Muavaefa’atasi) John E. Suisala to his Cabinet as ASNAP Director; and

WHEREAS, at the beginning of July 1994, Governor Lutali joined hundreds of senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, and government leaders for the official opening of the ASNAP. First Lady Susana Lutali issued the first ASNAP food stamp coupons to an elderly mother, a blind father, and a disabled young man. Governor Lutali described it as “a happy day for me and for those who came to witness its opening.” Included herein is an excerpt from Governor Lutali’s biography, **My Samoan Journey**, which tells the story of how the ASNAP started; and

WHEREAS, the 2002 Farm Bill—the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 consolidated the nutrition assistance block grants that funds the ASNAP and Puerto Rico’s nutrition assistance program and increased the new consolidated grant to an amount slightly above what would have been under regular inflation indexing; and

WHEREAS, in the past 30 years, the annual ASNAP MOUs were executed by USDA FNS Regional Administrators Sharon Levinson, Allen Ng, and currently Jesus Mendoza, and Governors A. P. Lutali, Tauese P. F. Sunia, Togiola T. A. Tulafono, Lolo M. Moliga, and currently Lemanu P. S. Mauga. During the same period, the ASNAP was under the leadership of Directors (Muavaefa’atasi) John E. Suisala; Marie Ma’o, Dr. Lealofi Uiagalelei, (Vaitautolu) Talia Fa’afetai I’aulualo, Leilua Stevenson, Taeaofua Dr. Meki Solomona, and currently Muavaefa’atasi John E. Suisala, and under the management of Assistant Directors Solagaliua Solaita, Panisia Neueli, Josie Lutali, Carol Samoa, and currently Lagia Fulu Tuala; and

WHEREAS, 3,600 elderly, blind, and disabled individuals were served by the ASNAP when it first opened in 1994 at an annual cost of \$5.3 million. Today, close to 5,000 elderly, blind, and disabled individuals are receiving monthly benefits of up to \$177 at an annual cost of \$11.7 million; and

WHEREAS, in the past 30 years, American Samoa was awarded \$207.7 million to issue monthly food assistance in the form of food coupons (soon to convert to using electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards) to our low-income elderly, blind, and disabled individuals. Moreover, additional funding was secured by or awarded to the ASNAP to provide food assistance for our people such as \$3.5 million in ARRA funding; \$18.5 million for victims of Tropical Cyclone Gita; \$17.4 million in COVID-19 funding; \$25.6 million for Pandemic EBT for all school children in 2021, 2022, and 2023; and \$2.9 million for Summer EBT for school children in 2024; and

WHEREAS, the people of American Samoa commend the U.S. Congress, along with the late Congressman Faleomavaega Eni Hunkin and Congresswoman Uifa’atali Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagon, for continuing to authorize annual funding for the ASNAP. We also extend our gratitude and appreciation to the USDA FNS leadership and staff at the National and Western Regional Offices for their strong and ongoing support of the ASNAP over the past 30 years.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, LEMANU P. S. MAUGA, Governor of the Territory of American Samoa, do hereby proclaim that throughout July 2024 we celebrate “30 Years of ASNAP in American Samoa.” I urge everyone, especially ASNAP recipients, to celebrate this significant milestone. We recount and reflect on the impacts that ASNAP has made on American Samoa’s

economy and ASNAP recipients and their families by supplementing their grocery budget so they can access the nutritious food that is essential for better health outcomes and overall well-being.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto affixed my signature and the seal of my office on this 24th day of June, in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-four.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Mauga', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

LEMANU P. S. MAUGA

Governor

MY SAMOAN JOURNEY



A.P. LUTALI

I believe government has an obligation to take care of those who are not able to help themselves, including the elderly, disabled, and children. I believe we need to provide a safety net for those who require assistance. When I returned to work in 1994, one of my priorities was to establish social programs to help our low-income

senior citizens, disabled individuals, and children. Although I had extended to Samoa several federal assistance programs for the elderly during my time in Washington as delegate at large, I was convinced these programs were not adequately funded to provide for their nutritional needs. I was also convinced that the nutritional needs of low-income disabled individuals and children under five years old were not being met.

When I traveled to Washington after taking office in January 1993 to attend the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, I met with Congressman Faleomavaega to inform him of my intention to pursue two federal assistance programs for American Samoa. These were the very two programs that the Congressman wanted to introduce to American Samoa during the immediate past administration but were refused by Governor Coleman. Faleomavaega agreed to give me all the assistance I needed to secure these critically needed programs for our people. We agreed to pursue them one at a time. The Food Stamp program we agreed to extend to American Samoa would be modified to benefit only our low-income elderly, blind, and disabled individuals, while the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) would benefit pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children five years and under.

Upon my return to American Samoa, I quickly established a task force to provide all the information and technical assistance needed for this purpose. Additionally, I designated John E. Suisala to be American Samoa's chief negotiator with the federal government. At the time, John was an assistant to Congressman Faleomavaega in Washington, D.C., and had been involved in laying the groundwork for this effort since 1991.

Despite criticism from local leaders and certain quarters of the public that these programs would disrupt our culture and traditions, I pushed forward with all my efforts because I believed these services were critical and certainly helpful.

144

My Samoan Journey

More than twenty years earlier, I had received the same criticism while negotiating to secure federal assistance for our senior citizens. These programs, under the direction of the Territorial Administration on Aging (TAOA) have been in place ever since without any noticeable negative impact on our culture or traditions. Meanwhile, the government is still being criticized for not providing enough services for the elderly.

In May 1994, I signed a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish a modified food stamp program in American Samoa to be known as the American Samoa Nutrition Assistance Program (ASNAP) at a cost of \$5.3 million annually.

The following month, I appointed John Suisala to my cabinet as head of ASNAP. He would set up the service delivery system, hire and train staff, and establish the program immediately. I came to know John's professional capabilities during my first term as governor while he was working in a management position in the Department of Manpower Resources, later renamed the Department of Human Resources. Since that time, I found him to be an intelligent young man of sound moral character. I was always impressed with his sense of loyalty and as an honest and sincere public servant. I saw in him qualities of a leader, and I was glad to use his talents and capabilities during my first administration. When the need arose to establish an agency to deliver social programs to our people, I chose John without hesitation.

In the beginning of July 1994, I was pleased to join hundreds of senior citizens and disabled individuals for the official opening of this much needed program. It was a happy day for me and for those who came to witness its opening. Susana was honored to issue the first food stamp coupons to an elderly mother, a blind father, and a disabled young man.

Because of the success of ASNAP since its inception the previous year, I decided it was time to pursue the second assistance pro-

gram - one which would benefit children five years and under, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. In 1995, I asked John to take the lead in establishing a WIC program in American Samoa.

To ensure that both programs would be administered efficiently, effectively and with integrity, I established by executive order the Agency on Aging and Food and Nutrition Services (AAFNS) to manage and control ASNAP and the soon-to-be-established WIC program. I also decided to place TAOA under the management and control of this new agency and designated John as director for all three programs.

My decision to transfer the 22-year-old TAOA program under an umbrella agency was based on concern that services for senior citizens were not provided efficiently and effectively. I was also convinced that immediate reform was needed to contain costs, streamline operations, and expand and improve service delivery for the elderly. I had also made a longstanding promise to the senior citizens that I would build them a multi-purpose senior center and I was determined to accomplish this before the end of my term. Finally, I was adamant about preventing a recurrence of the problems I had found at TAOA in 1985. With John at the helm, I was confident these things would be accomplished.

I was pleased I made the right decision. When I left office in January 1997, major reform had already taken place at TAOA that brought about a number of positive results. The staffing level, which had been extremely high, was reduced by 33 percent. The value of food vouchers for some 1,600 senior citizens was increased by 20 percent. Salaries for almost 300 senior citizens in the employment program were increased by almost 15 percent. The service delivery system was expanded and improved significantly, and a brand new multi-purpose senior center was completed. At the official opening of this center in October 1996, I was honored to find that this complex, consisting of two identical buildings and a Samoan guest *fale*, was named the A. P. LUTALI SENIOR CENTER.