

# Operations Memorandum - Food Stamps

## OPS080905

September 25, 2008

**SUBJECT:** Expanded Categorical Eligibility for Food Stamp (FS) Households  
**TO:** Executive Directors  
**FROM:** Joanne Glover, Director, Bureau of Operations

### Purpose

To inform County Assistance Offices (CAOs) about the expansion of Categorical Eligibility (CE) that eliminates the resource test for almost all FS households and an explanation of the few exceptions to this policy. This revised policy is effective October 2008.

### Background/Discussion

Federal regulations at 7 CFR 273.2(j)(2) allow states to confer CE to households that receive services funded with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) money. The United States Department of Agriculture issued guidance on how to interpret this rule as it relates to the TANF block grant. The rule allows states great flexibility in establishing resource limits for FS households that are consistent with TANF funded programs and services. Many states have eliminated the FS resource test under this rule because it helps working families, the newly unemployed, people with disabilities and vulnerable seniors. Many households no longer have to exhaust their savings before accessing the FS Program.

The Department of Public Welfare has opted to confer CE and eliminate the resource test for almost all FS households by providing them with the TANF-funded brochure, ["Help for Pennsylvanians In Need" \(Attachment\)](#). This change will promote savings among low-income households and make more low-income families eligible. It will also simplify the application process for households and the eligibility process for CAOs and result in fewer quality control errors.

### New Policy

All households with gross income at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (FPIGs) (200 percent of the FPIGs for a household with an elderly or disabled member) that receive the "Help for Pennsylvanians in Need" brochure are receiving a TANF-funded service and are, therefore, categorically eligible for the FS program.

Expanded CE eliminates the resource test and is extended to almost all FS households at application and renewal when they are given the brochure. If the application contains resource information, the CAO may enter this information into the Client Information

System (CIS), but verification is not required and must not be requested.

**Note: For Expedited FS, the CAO must review resources to determine eligibility for expedited services, but verification is not required.**

For system processing, CIS will be updated to automatically remove the resource cap, look at gross income (200 percent for elderly/disabled households), and identify households that do not qualify for expanded CE. CIS will apply the resource test for households that do not qualify. The existing FS caseload will be phased in when the worker enters the case to take an action, or completes a SAR review or a renewal. All system changes as the result of expanded CE implementation will be addressed in a CIS Daily Status.

There remains no gross income test for elderly/disabled households. Elderly/disabled households with gross income above 200 percent of the FPIGs remain potentially eligible for food stamps if they pass the net income test. Many such households may qualify for the minimum benefit.

The following few households do not qualify for Expanded CE:

- Elderly/disabled households with income above 200 percent of the FPIGs,
- Households whose head of household is currently disqualified for failing to comply with employment and training requirements, or
- A household that has an Intentional Program Violation (IPV) that currently results in the disqualification of a household member.

**Examples:**

- o A two-person elderly/disabled household applies for FS-only on November 2, 2008. The household is provided with the “Help for Pennsylvanians In Need” brochure. The household reports gross income in the amount of \$1,550 and resources of \$3,200. The household is CE since the income is below 200 percent of the FPIGs.
- o A four-person household applies for FS/MA on November 2, 2008. The household contains an elderly grandmother, her daughter and the daughter’s husband and child. The household is provided with the “Help for Pennsylvanians In Need” brochure. Household income is from SSI and wages in the amount of \$2,460. Resources are \$4,500. The household is CE since the household’s income is below 200 percent of the FPIGs.
- o A three-person household, which is not elderly or disabled is receiving MA and applies for FS on November 15, 2008. The

household is provided with the “Help for Pennsylvanians in Need” brochure. The household reports gross income in the amount of \$1,500, but does not complete the resource information on the application. The head of household has not been disqualified for an Employment and Training violation or for an IPV. No resource information is required. The household is eligible for CE.

- o A three-person household applies for FS/MA on November 9, 2008. The household contains a husband, wife and their child. The household is provided with the “Help for Pennsylvanians In Need” brochure. When reviewing the case record, it is determined that an IPV still applies to the husband and he is not eligible. The household is not granted CE, but the wife and child may still receive FS if their resources are under the FS resource limit.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***Must the household participate in one of the services listed on the brochure to be granted CE?***

No. The household does not need to participate in any of the services listed to be granted CE.

### ***How will FS households receive the brochure?***

The CAO is required to provide the brochure to all FS applicant households. CAOs should hand the brochure to all walk-in applicants and mail the brochure for all mail-in applications. An initial supply of brochures will be provided to the CAOs. Additional quantities may be ordered from the warehouse. The brochure is also available on Docushare.

Households that apply for FS benefits via COMPASS will be able to view and print the brochure by clicking on the link provided during the completion of the application process. For FS recipients, the brochure will be mailed as part of the automated renewal process.

### ***How do we identify households that have received the brochure?***

All FS applicants and recipients are required to receive the brochure; therefore, it is assumed that every applicant/recipient will have received the brochure as part of the application/renewal process. There is no requirement to track or narrate the receipt of the brochure.

### ***Will the current policy found in FS Handbook Section 512.1, relating to CE, change based on the expansion of CE?***

No. The expansion of CE does not change the current CE policy for those households containing all cash assistance, Supplemental Security Income and/or Family Works members.

**Next Steps**

1. Review this information with your staff.
2. Direct questions to your Area Manager.
3. This Operations Memorandum will become obsolete when the information contained herein is incorporated into the FS Handbook.