

Operations Memorandum - Food Stamps - Cash Assistance OPS080909

September 30, 2008

SUBJECT: Time Frame for Suspending Food Stamps (FS) and Cash Assistance
When There Is No Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Activity

TO: Executive Directors

FROM: Joanne Glover, Director, Bureau of Operations

Purpose

To inform County Assistance Offices that the time frame for suspending benefits for the Food Stamp and cash assistance programs, when there is no EBT activity, is changed from 90 days to 180 days. This change is mandated for the Food Stamp Program (FSP) by the 2008 Farm Bill. For program consistency, suspension of cash benefits follows the FSP policy. This change is effective October 1, 2008.

Background/Discussion

The FSP was recently reauthorized as part of The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-246). The law contains various provisions that affect FS eligibility and benefits that will be beneficial to FS households by potentially increasing the amount of benefits households receive.

An Information Memorandum provided general information regarding the time frame for suspending FS and cash assistance when there is no EBT activity. This change will not be part of the Mass Grant Change (MGC), but will take place after the MGC software is installed. The Policy is as follows:

TIME FRAME FOR SUSPENDING FS AND CASH ASSISTANCE

WHEN THERE IS NO EBT ACTIVITY

Current FS Policy: FS benefits are currently suspended when a household does not use the EBT card to access its benefits within 90 days (three months).

Current Cash Assistance Policy: When a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), General Assistance (GA), or State Supplementary Payment (SSP) cash benefit is posted to an EBT account and not accessed within 90 days (three months), the cash benefit is suspended and posted as returned.

New FS Policy:

- Benefits are suspended at 180 days (six months) when a household does not access FS benefits during that time frame.
- A Confirming Notice is sent centrally to the household using reason code 452, which provides revised text to reflect the new time period.
- If there is no contact from the household, benefits remain suspended.
- If the household contacts the CAO and requests access to benefits, the CAO will make the FS benefits that were moved off line and stored available to the household within 48 hours of the request.
- If a household does not access benefits within 12 months, the benefits will be expunged and cannot be restored. The case will remain suspended until the next SAR review or renewal. If no response to the SAR form or the renewal the case will close.

This new policy will not be included in the MGC.

REMINDER: The CAO will not close a FS case if a case alert is generated at six months indicating that the budget is in suspension because of EBT inactivity.

New Cash Policy:

- Benefits will be suspended at 180 days (six months) when a household does not access their benefits in that time frame.
- A Confirming Notice is sent centrally to the TANF, GA or SSP cash assistance household, using reason code 451, which provides revised text to reflect the new time frame.
- If a SSP recipient contacts the CAO, the worker will reinstate the SSP benefit as timely as possible.
- If a TANF or GA recipient contacts the CAO, the worker will review with the client whether there is continued need for the cash benefits. If it is determined that the need continues, cash benefits will be reinstated as timely as possible, according to CAH 180.581, Replacement of Returned Benefits.
- If the household does not access benefits within 12-months, the benefits will be expunged and cannot be restored. The case will remain suspended until the next SAR review or renewal. If there is no response to the SAR form or renewal the case will close.

REMINDER: The CAO will not close a cash case if a case alert is generated at six months, indicating that the budget is in suspension because of EBT activity.

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 and Cash Assistance handbooks.