



CDSS

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES



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June 16, 2009

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 09-25

To: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL COUNTY CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL FOOD STAMP PROGRAM SPECIALISTS
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAMS MANAGERS
ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM COORDINATORS
ALL COUNTY TRANSITIONAL HOUSING COORDINATORS

SUBJECT: FOOD STAMP APPLICATION PROCESS FOR YOUTH WHO ARE
“AGING OUT” OF FOSTER CARE

<u>REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> State Law Change
<input type="checkbox"/> Federal Law or Regulation Change
<input type="checkbox"/> Court Order
<input type="checkbox"/> Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Initiated by CDSS

The purpose of this All County Letter (ACL) is to notify counties of the new process for receiving and processing Food Stamp Program (FSP) applications for youth whose foster care (FC) eligibility is ending as the result of the termination of their dependency. This process is discussed below and counties may begin using the procedure and providing applications for the targeted FC population as soon as these instructions have been received, but no later than August 1, 2009.

According to statewide statistics, each year approximately 4,500 youths “age out” of FC when they reach their 18th birthday or complete high school or its equivalent prior to reaching the age of 19. Many of these youth exit their foster home or facility with little or no income or assets and without accessing food stamp (FS) benefits to which they may be potentially eligible. While some may benefit from transitional housing opportunities or other available assistance programs, many are extremely vulnerable and may, in fact, be facing homelessness. In response, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) FS and FC staff, working collaboratively with a county workgroup, has developed instructions for a process that will enhance the likelihood that these youth will exit FC with improved nutritional security through access to FS benefits.

Foster Care youth become ineligible for FC at age 18 (if they have completed high school) or at the time they complete high school (if that occurs before they reach age 19). They must be enrolled and on schedule to graduate or attain a General Education Development Certificate before they reach 19 or the age of majority in order to remain

eligible for FC. A final determination to terminate dependency must be made by a judge at a formal hearing before the foster youth exits FC.

Application Process

The following procedure within existing regulations will provide the majority of the targeted foster youth with a better opportunity to participate in the FSP.

Counties can use whatever interview opportunity works best for an emancipating foster youth (the workgroup has identified the mandated JV-365, Termination of Dependency Jurisdiction – Child Attaining Age of Majority, interview as a potential best practice) for their particular county. The FS application will be provided to the youth during the interview (either by a county social worker or a food stamp worker if the county chooses to have a FS worker present) and will subsequently be forwarded to the appropriate county FS office once completed. The applicant will be instructed to provide information on the application that reflects his or her expected circumstances at the time dependency is terminated.

The FS office will hold the application for up to 30 days from the date it is received in the food stamp office. At the time dependency is terminated, the social worker (or other FC staff designated by the county) will notify the food stamp office so that the application can be acted upon. At that time, the FS office will evaluate the application for expedited service, and approve or deny the application based on FS eligibility criteria.

If emancipation is denied or delayed by the court, and the application cannot be processed in 30 days, the application must be denied and an appropriate notice of action issued. In such cases, counties are encouraged to look for an opportunity to have the youth complete another application, thus starting the 30-day clock again.

Counties are encouraged to use any other opportunity to provide the youth with an application if such an alternative better conforms to that county's business process.

It is critical that county FS and FC work collaboratively to provide cross training as necessary and to jointly identify and develop a process that works within that particular county's operations.

Forms

Counties are to continue to use whatever FS application forms are being used for other applicants. Counties should emphasize that the information provided by the youth

should reflect his or her anticipated circumstances at the time he or she leaves FC. All other existing criteria for eligibility and benefit determination remain in effect.

County of Jurisdiction

A number of foster youth are placed and are residing in foster homes or facilities that are out of the county maintaining the FC case. California FS regulations (63-401.1) mandate that a household must be living in the county in which it files an application for participation. This will necessitate cooperation and communication between both counties (i.e., the county maintaining the FC case and the county receiving the FS application and maintaining the FS case). However, because a relatively small number of foster youth are potentially eligible for FS (approximately 4,500 have their dependency terminated statewide each year), it is anticipated that this will not be overly administratively burdensome.

Child Welfare Program Responsibility

Pursuant to Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) 31-525.68, .86, and Welfare and Institutions Code 391, the Child Welfare Program (Social Worker/Independent Living Program Coordinator) is responsible for ensuring that youth who are aging out of FC receive assistance and referral for applying for FS benefits. County Child Welfare and FS staff must work collaboratively to ensure that all youth receive an opportunity to apply for FS benefits. Additionally, even though the FS application will be submitted up to 30 days before the youth exits FC, the actual processing of the application will not occur until the FS office has been notified of the date the youth's dependency is terminated. It is critical that counties develop a process to ensure that the application is submitted to the appropriate FS office timely and that notification of the dependency termination date, as decided by the court, be communicated to the FS office immediately.

Best Practices

Card and Benefit Issuance

Once dependency has been terminated, we encourage counties to provide benefits to the youth as soon as is administratively possible. Counties should continue to follow existing requirements for expedited service and for Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) issuance (either over-the-counter or mail issuance). Counties' procedures should ensure that the PUB #387 (California EBT card pamphlet) and EBT client training is provided to these applicants at the appropriate time.

Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System (SFIS)

If the interview and application forms are being taken in a location other than a FS office, counties can consider these as “out-of-office” interviews as specified in MPP 63-300.45. Therefore, the counties shall not require the youth to make a special trip into the office solely for the purpose of SFIS compliance. Instead, the counties should attempt to complete the SFIS requirement when the youth is in the office for any reason, but no later than at recertification as specified in MPP 63-300.451.

County’s Single Point of Contact

CDSS recommends that counties establish a single point of contact (i.e., a designated FS worker) to receive and process FS program applications for FC youth as well as to receive FS information from the FC social worker regarding termination of dependency or any delays. Youth should be provided with contact information for the FS office and/or eligibility staff before they exit FC in case the youths need to follow up on their FS application, report changes, etc. In addition, the county should confirm the mailing address for the EBT card and inquire about the need for expedited services. Some counties have indicated the intent to implement such practices and we encourage other counties to do the same.

NOTE:

This process does not change any conditions of eligibility, nor does it change any application processing requirement. Counties must continue to ensure that all federally-mandated requirements are satisfied. An interactive interview (telephone or in-person) must occur, each application must be evaluated for expedited service, and all mandated verification requirements must be met. It must be stressed to these applicants that any changes in their circumstances (i.e., household composition, address, income, etc.) that occur subsequent to the time the application is submitted must be reported to the food stamp office. In addition, it is critical that a process is in place to ensure that any required verification/documentation is forwarded to the appropriate food stamp office where the application is pending.

The CDSS FS and FC staff will be available to provide assistance as needed to help ensure that nutritional security is provided to some of California’s neediest and most vulnerable citizens. Please find attached a list of county Independent Living Program Coordinators as well as a list of county FSP Specialists.

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If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Jaeda Rios of the Food Stamp Policy Bureau at (916) 654-5709 or by email at Jaeda.Rios@dss.ca.gov, or Theresa Thurmond, Manager of the Independent Living Program Policy Unit at (916) 651-9974 or by email at theresa.thurmond@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

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Rev 4/1/09

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FOOD STAMP PROGRAM SPECIALIST LIST

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