

February 29, 2016

ALL COUNTY LETTER 16-14

TO: ALL CALWORKs SPECIALISTS
ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CALFRESH PROGRAM SPECIALISTS
ALL CONSORTIA REPRESENTATIVES
ALL QUALITY CONTROL COORDINATORS

SUBJECT: EXPEDITED SERVICE ENTITLEMENT AND APPLICATION
PROCESSING FOR CALFRESH

REFERENCES: ALL COUNTY LETTERS [88-54](#), [09-24](#), AND [12-74](#); ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE [I-45-11](#), [I-45-11E](#), [I-45-11E11](#) AND [I-60-13](#); MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES SECTIONS 11-601.1, 63-300.3, 63-300.4, 63-300.46, 63-300.5(e)(3), 63-301.1, 63-301.5, 63-301.51, 63-301.511, 63.512, 63-301.513, 63-301.52, 63-301.533, 63-301.548, 63-503.43, AND 63-804.4; TITLE 7 CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS PART 273.15(d), 273.2(c)(1), 273.2(f)(1)(vii), 273.2 (i)(2), 273.2(i)(3)(i), 273.2(i)(3)(iv), 273.2(i)(4)(i)(A) and (B); APPLICATION FOR CALFRESH BENEFITS; ASSEMBLY BILL 1359, CHAPTER 468, STATUTES OF 2012 AND ASSEMBLY BILL 2384 (ENACTED 1987); FOOD STAMP REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2002, PUBLIC LAW 107-171 OF MAY 13, 2002; WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE SECTIONS 18914 AND 18912(a); ADMINISTRATIVE NOTICE 10-09, HANDLING MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS FROM THE SAME HOUSEHOLD AND EXPEDITED SERVICE AND INTERVIEWS; 7 U.S.C. 2020 (e)(2)(C)

The purpose of this letter is to clarify and transmit current state and federal rules regarding Expedited Service (ES) entitlement and application processing in the CalFresh Program. A stakeholder workgroup, consisting of representatives from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), County Welfare Departments (CWDs), Statewide Automated Welfare System consortia (SAWS), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and the advocate community, was established to discuss the

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- ☐ State Law Change
- ☐ Federal Law or Regulation Change
- ☐ Court Order
- ☐ Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- ☒ Initiated by CDSS

different business processes that CWDs and SAWS have established and to share best practices to help CWDs meet the application processing timeframe for ES.

I. BACKGROUND

Assembly Bill (AB) 2384 (Chapter 1293, Statutes of 1987) changed certain provisions of the CalFresh Program concerning ES procedures transmitted in All County Letter (ACL) 88-54. The bill required CWDs to:

- 1) Orally inform potential applicants of the right to ES for entitled households and how to initiate the process.
- 2) Process applications for households entitled to ES within three calendar days [the current federal mandate is seven days under 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 273.2 (i)(3)(i)].
- 3) To conform state law with federal regulations that required verification be limited to only the applicant's identity in order to receive benefits under ES.
- 4) Collect and report data regarding ES processing, mandated to determine the effect of this legislation.

AB 1359 (Chapter 468, Statute of 2012) amended Welfare and Institutions (W&I) Code Section 18914, to require counties to screen **all** CalFresh applications to determine if applicants meet the criteria for ES entitlement as defined in Title 7 CFR Section 273.2(i)(2) and Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) Section 63-301.5. Prior to AB 1359, California W&I Code was inconsistent with federal guidance by only mandating CWDs to screen for ES entitlement if the household requested ES entitlement by answering specific questions on the CalFresh application.

When the CalFresh application indicates that the household meet one of the three ES criteria MPP Sections 63-301.511, .512, .513, the CWD must then process the household's application within three calendar days following the date that the paper or electronic application was filed in the CalFresh office.

If the statutory required three day timeframe has lapsed and the CWD is unable to process the application timely, CWDs shall continue the ES process to meet the seven day (federal) ES timeframe for issuing benefits. For the federal timeliness review, Quality Control (QC) staff reviews to issuance of ES benefits within seven days.

II. APPLICATION SUBMISSION

When a potential applicant contacts the CalFresh office, the CWD has the responsibility to inform the household that they have a right to file an application on the same day

they contact the CalFresh office during business hours. The household should be encouraged to provide as much information as possible on the application, but should never be discouraged from submitting an application with enough information to begin the application process. Pursuant to federal law, the application will be considered complete as long as the form contains the applicant's name, address, and signature or the signature of their authorized representative (AR). The CWD should draw attention to the importance of providing a phone number and/or email address and authorize the county to contact the household about the application. Providing a phone number and/or an email address is optional for the household, but the CWD should stress the importance of providing such information so the household can be contacted timely for their interview and other follow-up.

CWDs shall not refuse or otherwise deter submission of a CalFresh application at any time during business hours. If the CWD is closed on a regular business day (e.g., furloughs), applications submitted in a drop box must be date stamped on the day the office was closed. For applications received after business hours or on days that are not regular business days, the application must be date stamped the next business day (MPP Section 11-601).

For applications completed with an interactive phone interview, and a telephonic signature is acquired, the filling date is the date of the interview. For CWD's that don't have the ability to gather a telephonic signature, the filling date is when the signed application is received by the CWD office (MPP Sections 63-300.3, 63-301.1).

III. APPLICATION ASSISTERS

Many counties work with non-CWD partners to assist people with applications. It is important for these organizations to understand the applicants' rights to ES and to establish a process to ensure timely submission of all applications for the county to determine entitlement. The right of an applicant to be determined entitled for ES does not begin until the CWD has received the application and only the CWDs can determine entitlement for ES.

IV. INFORMING APPLICANTS OF THE AVAILABILITY OF EXPEDITED SERVICE

W&I Code 18912 (a) requires CWDs to orally inform each applicant household of the availability of ES. This can pose a challenge today because applicants apply through many portals: walk-in, telephone, mail, and online. For those online, the technology is not currently there to orally inform applicants. However, to best conform with the requirement, information regarding the applicant's right to ES and how to initiate the process shall be added at or near the beginning of the online application. All online applications must conform to all state paper applications developed for the purpose of determining eligibility and benefit levels for CalFresh benefits.

The CWDs shall not require applicants without a fixed address to receive their mail at one specific place and/or place restrictions on the ability to apply for benefits. Options to ensure that clients without a fixed address receive notices include:

- Holding correspondence at the local office for pick-up
- Using the address of a local shelter (with the shelter's permission)
- Use the address of a trusted friend or family member (with permission)
- Send correspondence to a local post office as general delivery.

(See the "Questions and Answers about SNAP for Homeless Persons" fact sheet. http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/Homeless_QA.pdf).

V. SCREENING ALL APPLICATIONS FOR EXPEDITED SERVICE

The CWD shall be responsible for screening all applications for ES as they are filed. The CWDs' application procedures shall be designed to identify households entitled to ES at the time the household files an application for CalFresh benefits [7 CFR 273.2(i)(2) and MPP Section 63-301.52]. Therefore, when the household or application assister submits their CalFresh application to the CWD on-line or in person, the CWD must date stamp the application received and must screen the application for ES entitlement.

The CalFresh application asks ES screening questions on the first page of the application, allowing applicant households to easily provide information that the household meets ES criteria. This is particularly relevant for applications in which minimal information has been provided. If the CWD has a receptionist, volunteer, or other employee that is responsible for screening applications, they should screen to see if the household meets one of the ES criteria (MPP 63-301.511, .512, .513).

The CWDs shall not limit ES screening to specific questions on the application. The entire application should be reviewed for ES criteria as information may be listed in other areas of the application.

Online applications must include all the elements of the paper application questions as they are asked on the *Application for CalFresh Benefits* (CF 285) and *Application for CalFresh, Cash Aid, And/or Medi-Cal/Health Care Programs* (SAWS 2 Plus) and include the same ES screening questions to assist the screener. CWDs must remember that applicant completion of the ES screening questions are optional and are not a requirement for submitting the online application.

Determining ES Entitlement

The CWDs must use the ES criteria in accordance with MPP Section 63-301.5 to determine households' eligibility for ES at screening or any time during the application process.

The CWDs are reminded about the following circumstances that impact determining ES entitlement:

1) Limited Income and Resources:

- Households are entitled to ES if they have **both**, less than \$150 in gross monthly income **and** liquid resources of \$100 or less.

Note: Currently California has implemented the federal option to disregard resources under Modified Categorical Eligibility as outlined in ACL 09-24, dated May 27, 2009. However, for ES determination, liquid resources are still counted and must be considered. Liquid resources can include cash on hand, checking or savings accounts, savings certificates, and lump-sum payments.

2) Combined Rent/Mortgage and Utility Costs:

- Households whose **combined** gross monthly income and liquid resources are less than the household's monthly rent or mortgage and utility costs are entitled to ES. If the household has utility costs, the mandatory standard utility allowance **must** be applied for those households that fall under this ES criterion, not the actual utility cost. Under regular issuance rules a utility cost has to be incurred (the bill does not have to be paid), in order to utilize the standard utility allowance for ES determination. Mandatory Standard Utility Allowance (SUA), Limited Utility Allowance (LUA) and Telephone Utility Allowance (TUA) are the utility costs that must be applied in combination with the household's rent or mortgage expenses when determining ES entitlement.

3) Migrant or seasonal farmworker: Households with migrant or seasonal farmworkers and who are destitute are entitled to ES if their liquid resources are \$100 or less:

- Migrant – A migrant for CalFresh purposes is an individual who travels away from home on a regular basis, usually with a group of laborers to seek employment in an agriculturally related activity. A migrant household is a household that travels for this purpose.
- Seasonal Farmworkers – A seasonal farmworker is a person who is employed in agricultural employment of a seasonal or other temporary nature and is not required to be absent overnight from his permanent place of residence when:
 - Employed on a farm or ranch performing field work related to planting, cultivating, or harvesting operations; or employed in canning, packing, ginning, seed conditioning or related research or

- processing operations, and transported or caused to transported, to or from the place of employment by means of a day-haul operation.
- Destitute (MPP Section 63-503.43) – Destitute means that the household's only income for the month of application was:
 - Received before the date of application and it was from a terminated source, or
 - Received from a new source and no more than \$25 will be received by the tenth calendar day after the date of application, or
 - A combination of (a) and (b).

Agency Conference for Households Not Entitled to ES

While there is no requirement that applicants be notified of their ineligibility for ES, state regulation requires that counties offer an agency conference, described in MPP 63-804.4 and 7 CFR 273.15 (d). The agency conference is a process that allows the household the right to request a face-to-face meeting with an eligibility supervisor (this meeting may be attended by an eligibility worker and authorized representative) to informally resolve any dispute as to whether the household meets ES criteria. The agency conference cannot supplant or interfere with a state hearing request.

The CWD shall provide information about the right to an agency conference at the same time the household is informed of possible ES entitlement and processing. CWDs shall inform by any or all of the following methods; verbally inform, post signs in their lobbies, or attach an informational sheet on the application packet. The agency conference shall be scheduled within two working days of the request, unless the household requests that it be scheduled later or states that they do not wish to have an agency conference. If the CWD is unable to contact the household to schedule the agency conference, the application will continue under normal application process. The CDSS will be revising the CF 285 and SAWS 2 Plus to include this information at a later date.

Late Determination of ES Entitlement

Applications that are screened out because the household did not provide sufficient information in order for the CWD to make a determination for ES entitlement must be routed and scheduled for normal processing. If ES entitlement is discovered at the subsequent interview or any time during the application process, the ES time clock starts from the date the CWD became aware the household was entitled to ES processing (this is the date of discovery). In these circumstances, the CWD will follow Late Determination guidelines found at MPP 63-301.533 and 7 CFR 273.2(i)(3)(iv).

Example 1: An application submitted on May 1 with only a name, address and signature (day zero). The application is screened out as ineligible for ES on May 2 (day one) because the county doesn't have information sufficient to make an ES entitlement

determination, and is routed for the CWD to schedule the applicant household for an interview appointment on May 10. At the interview the applicant provides new information making them entitled for ES and eligible for benefits. This day becomes the date of discovery (day one). If the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card is loaded and a Personal Identification Number (PIN) made available to access their benefits that same day, the ES timeframe has been met on day one.

The CWDs should establish protocols for how to handle calls from applicants who would like to report a change in circumstance subsequent to submitting their application and having their interview, which may make them entitled for ES process.

For purposes of late determination, the three day timeframe then begins on the date the CWD discovered the household was entitled to ES [MPP Section 63-301.533 and CFR 273.2 (i)(3)(iv)].

Example 2: On June 4th a household submits an application with name, address and signature (this is day zero). The next day the CWD screens the application and realizes that the application is only partially completed and the Eligibility Worker (EW) cannot make a determination for ES entitlement because the application is missing all the necessary information (this is day one). The EW schedules the household for an interview on June 18th for normal processing and provides the household with an appointment date and time. The household shows up for their interview on June 18th and the EW assists the household in completing the rest of the application. During the interview the EW discovers that the household meets one of the ES criteria and is determined entitled (this is day one). The same day the household is provided their EBT card loaded and their PIN number made available to access their benefits. The CWD has met their ES timeframe.

VI. PROCESSING APPLICANTS FOUND ENTITLED TO EXPEDITED SERVICE

Applicants determined to be entitled to ES will receive a CalFresh eligibility determination and benefits available to be used on their EBT card no later than the third calendar day following the date the application was filed. For purposes of this section, a weekend (Saturday and Sunday) shall be considered one calendar day. However, if the third calendar day is a nonworking day or holiday, the CWD shall make benefits available on or before the working day immediately preceding the nonworking day.

Scheduling Interviews

If the CWD does not do same day interviews, and the household has been determined entitled to ES, the CWD must attempt to contact the household to conduct an interview, collect the needed verifications, and issue benefits within the three day timeframe. Applicant methods of contact can include a telephone number, an email address, or a message phone. The preferred method of contact is telephone or electronic. In addition,

CDSS encourages CWDs to provide the household with an appointment letter to remind them of their scheduled interview appointment. CWDs are encouraged to provide households with interview options and to utilize existing technology, such as telephones and computers, to expand accessibility.

If the household is not available by phone, messages left for the applicant/recipient should contain information relative to the interview. When scheduling the date and time of the interview appointment for households, the CWD must remember confidentiality. CWDs should develop scripts to ensure that specific information is provided when leaving a message for the household. For example, the following is an acceptable script that the CWD can use when the CWD calls and there is no answer:

“Hello, my name is Anna Smith. This call is for Pat Jones. I am calling in regards to your recent application submitted on March 24. You have been scheduled for an interview on March 25, 2015 at 9:00 am at the following address/location. Please make sure that you bring proof of your identity.”

“If you cannot make the scheduled appointment time, please call back at your earliest convenience at (999) 999-9999 to reschedule your interview appointment. Thank you.”

If the CWD calls the message phone number and someone other than the applicant/recipient household answers the phone, the CWD could say:

“Hello, my name is Anna Smith. This call is for Pat Jones. I am calling in regards to his/her recent application that was submitted March 24. He/she has been scheduled for an interview on March 25, 2015 at 9:00 am at the following address/location. Please make sure he/she brings proof of identity.”

“If he/she cannot make the scheduled appointment time, please have them call back at their earliest convenience at (999) 999-9999 to reschedule their interview appointment. Thank you.”

The script information can also be used in the appointment letter and email or text (if permission is obtained from the applicant household). The CWD must document in the case file when the call was made to the household and what information was left, including the date and time of the interview. The CWD can send out a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) if the applicant/recipient is a “no show” for their first scheduled interview on the day of the missed interview or the next day.

If the CWDs prefer not to use the above-referenced scripts, CWDs must have their scripts approved by CDSS prior to using them to ensure applicant confidentiality is preserved. Thus it is highly recommended that the CWD involve their county counsel when developing their scripts. Submission of such scripts should be sent to your CalFresh county contact.

Conducting Interviews

The applicant shall be treated with respect during the interview process and in all instances the household's right to privacy shall be maintained. The scope of the interview shall not extend beyond the examination of household circumstances which directly relate to the determination of eligibility and basis of benefit issuance (MPP Section 63-300.4).

When conducting interactive interviews, either in person or over the phone, all information must be documented in the case file and the CWD should provide the household with a copy of the application information once the interview is complete. Federal law requires households must be provided a copy of the online application submitted in a CWD office or when a telephonic signature is used in place of an actual signature. [7 CFR 273.2 (c)(1)] and 2008 Farm Bill 7 U.S.C. 2020(e)(2)(C)(iii)(IV)].

Notice of Missed Interview

For those found entitled to ES, the CWD shall schedule the household for their initial interview as soon as possible and within three days. If the household fails to attend the interview, the CWD will send a NOMI to remind the household to reschedule their interview prior to the 30th day after application. If the household fails to contact the CWD to scheduled or keep their second interview under normal 30-day processing and time has run out for processing the application by the 30th day, the CWD must deny the application for not completing the application process (MPP Section 63-300.46)

The CWDs should route applications for normal processing when an interview appointment is missed and the CWD is unable to provide ES processing because "a household fails to complete the application process." (FNS Admin Notice/ Expedited Service and Interviews, February 17, 2006).

Example: An applicant completes and files on application online for CalFresh benefits on September 1, Saturday night (Saturday and Sunday are counted as one day, this is day zero). After the weekend, the CWD screens the application for ES entitlement on September 3 (this is day one), Monday morning, and determines the household is ES entitled. The EW calls and is unable to speak with the applicant, so the EW leaves a detailed recorded message with the specific date and time of the initial scheduled interview appointment for September 4. The household misses the interview on September 4 (this is day two). The CWD mails the NOMI to the household on a mail batch run the following day (still day two) to inform the household that they have missed their scheduled interview appointment and to inquire if the household is still interested in receiving CalFresh benefits. If so, the NOMI provides that they must contact the county to reschedule the interview. That same day the application is routed for normal processing. The household contacts the CWD two days later and is scheduled again for a second interview on September 10. On September 10, the household appears for their interview and the household complies with the requirements to complete the

interview process (this is day three). If the CWD determines ES entitlement and eligibility, provides the household with a loaded EBT card and PIN number available to access their benefits for the household to use the same day, the CWD has met their ES timeframe on day three.

Verification Requirements for ES

As a reminder of CalFresh verification rules, go to All County Information Notice I-45-11. For determination of aid for ES entitled applicants, the only verification needed is Identification at the time the application is processed for ES pursuant to [7 CFR 273.2 (i)(4)(i)(A)]. The CWD can verify identity through Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS) or any other known to county information. All other eligibility factors can be postponed for a later time but no later than the 30th day following the date of application.

A picture Identification (ID) is **not** required and the CWDs shall not require specific verification from any household. CWDs are required to accept any document that reasonably establishes the applicant's identity and cannot accept only one type of verification. If the applicant has applied for benefits in the past or is a current recipient of another county's services, the CWD can locate the identity verification from the applicant's case file and accept it as already verified [MPP Section 63-300.5(e)(3)].

Verification can be done, with the permission of the applicant and the appropriate disclosure to the applicant, through collateral contact, documentary evidence, or home visit, which must be scheduled in advance, or as a last resort, a self-attestation from the household [7 CFR 273.2(f)(1)(vii)]. If an applicant cannot obtain sufficient verification on his or her own, the CWD is required to provide assistance and, if sufficient proof of identity cannot be obtained, the local office can accept a self-attestation from collateral contact who confirms the applicant's identity. If something becomes questionable, then the CWD is required to request verification for that questionable item.

- Gross income – in the case of no income, verification would be a statement that the household has no income shall suffice.
- Liquid resources – include cash on hand, checking or savings accounts, savings certificates, and lump sum payments.
- Work registration – required prior to certification, the CWD must make available to each applicant the ability to register for work unless the applicant is exempt or an AR is applying on behalf of the household.
- Social Security Numbers (SSN) – the household must furnish a social security number (card is **not** required) for each person who has one or apply for one for each person before the first full month of participation (The T and U Visa population is exempt from this requirement).

The CWD shall make reasonable efforts to complete all verifications within the ES timeframe; however, benefits shall not be delayed beyond the delivery standard of three days solely because these eligibility factors have not been verified. Verification can be postponed only for determining ES entitlement and benefit level.

Out-of-State Verification for ES

Migrants are entitled to postpone out-of-state verification until the third month only once each season. Later in the season, the out-of-state verification must be submitted before the second month's issuance.

For migrant and seasonal farmworker households, eligibility and benefit level for the month of application is determined by only counting income that was received between the first day of the month and the date of application. Any income from a new source that is anticipated after the day of initial application is disregarded. CWDs are reminded not to negatively impact the household if out-of-state verification is delayed.

Certification Periods for ES

The CDSS simplified the certification periods for all ES households. This simplification is in compliance with 7 CFR Sections 273.2(i)(4)(A) and (B). In current state regulations, Semi-Annual (SAR) and change reporting (CR) households are treated differently regarding certification length. In an effort to promote program simplification, ACL 12-74, released on December 24, 2013, instructed CWDs to certify all ES households for the maximum certification allowable, in accordance with the household's circumstances.

How Often to Certify Households with the ES Process

Pursuant to MPP Section 63-301.548 and 7 CFR 273.2(i)(4)(E)(iv), there is no limit to the number of times a household can be found entitled to benefits through ES procedures, as long as prior to each expedited finding, the household provided all postponed verification from the previous request or has had received benefits under normal processing. CWDs must ensure that the household has met the above requirements prior to issuing the household benefits under ES processing on a different request.

Recertification

Households found entitled through ES are subject to the same recertification requirements as all households. Households reapplying after less than a one-month break in certification shall be entitled to ES if determined eligible as specified in MPP Section 63-301.51. The CWD shall not continue benefits beyond the end of the certification period unless the household has been recertified.

VII. BENEFITS ISSUED TO EXPEDITED SERVICE ENTITLED PARTICIPANTS

The CWDs must provide all participants with the opportunity to participate. This consists of providing households with an active EBT card and PIN number made available to access benefits that have been posted onto the household's EBT account and made available for spending.

Procedures for Issuance of Benefits:

- The CWD shall have written procedures for issuance of benefits within the three day ES standard timeframe.
- Written procedures for issuing benefits on an expedited standard shall clearly state the process for providing the household the opportunity to participate within the three day timeframe.
- The procedures shall include instructions for the household to pick up their EBT and PIN number at their local CalFresh office; or
- Shall include the process for households having their EBT and PIN number mailed separately and having their benefits made available for use by the third calendar day following the day the application was filed.
- Whichever procedure the county has for issuing the EBT card PIN number, the procedures must be consistent across the board with all cases and not selective cases or household populations.

Timeliness Standards

County agencies must mail or have EBT cards available for pick-up (and post benefits to the EBT account, issue a PIN number, and provide all the training) in time to ensure that the recipient can access his/her benefits before the three day ES timeframe expires. Mailing time does not count toward the opportunity to participate and does not affect the ES three day timeframe.

Example: An applicant comes into the CalFresh office on Monday and completes and files his/her application on that day (day zero). Before the applicant leaves the office, the CWD screens the application and determines the applicant to be ES entitled; the EW verifies the applicant's ID and schedules an interview appointment for the applicant on the following day, Tuesday (day one). On Tuesday, the EW calls the applicant on the phone and conducts a telephone interview. That same day the EW informs the applicant to come into the office to pick up his/her EBT card and select their PIN number to access their CalFresh benefits. The applicant is having car trouble so he/she asks the EW to mail the EBT card instead. The EW mails the EBT card and PIN number separately to the applicant household that afternoon (the ES clock stops when the EW mails the EBT card and PIN number to the household). The household receives the EBT card on Thursday (day two) and the PIN number on Friday (day three). The CWD

has met the ES timeframe on day one when both the EBT card and PIN number were put in the mail at the households request.

VIII. REPORTING

The CDSS would like to remind CWDs that application processing data should be correctly reported for both non-ES and ES households on the CalFresh Monthly Caseload Movement Statistical Report (DFA 296) or the CalFresh Expedited Service Quarterly Statistical Report (DFA 296X) forms respectively (even for same day processing). Note that in 2016 the DFA 296 and DFA 296X will be phased out and all ES information will be incorporated into a new redesigned reporting form, the CalFresh Monthly Caseload Movement Statistical Report (CF 296). On this new report form, ES application data will be a subset of the overall application numbers. Until the release of the CF 296 and instructions for combined reporting, both forms must be filled out as applicable.

Example: Two separate households come to the CWD office to apply for CalFresh benefits. One household is a husband and wife and they are both homeless and have no money. The husband and wife applied, were interviewed, both verified identity and were processed under ES. The other household is a mother with two children who is working part-time at \$10 an hour and has \$165 in her checking account when they come in to apply for CalFresh. The mother and two children were not entitled to ES because their monthly gross income put them over the income criteria and therefore were processed under normal processing. Since the CWD does same day processing for all applications, both households were able to walk out of the CWD office with an active EBT card and PIN number and benefits posted onto their EBT account for spending on the same day. So when reporting on the DFA 296 and DFA 296X, the CWD must count both households on the DFA 296 for completed applications for the month and count the homeless husband and wife application on the DFA 296X for ES entitlement processed under the three day ES timeframe.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXPEDITED SERVICE WORKGROUP

Application Submission and Screening

When a client enters a CWD, it is important that they have a positive and effective experience. As a best practice, a CWD assigns a lobby greeter to guide clients to where they need to go, such as, to request immediate assistance or to divert clients to lobby phones and/or personal computers for call center and online applications. The greeter can also accept paperwork drop off and issue needed forms. If your CWD has a kiosk, assign staff that is bilingual so that they are able to provide good customer service, inform the client of other services that are offered, such as, assistance in completing the application and, if needed, provide interpretation services. It was also recommended to establish a benchmark wait time of 20 minutes or less.

A recommended practice is attaching a half sheet of paper to the top of the application for the applicant to read the ES criteria and process up front before they even look at the application questions. This may also encourage the applicant to complete the entire application. For example, the sheet of paper can state:

You may be able to get your benefits within three days if you meet one of the criteria below:

- 1. You have less than \$150 of gross monthly income and less than \$100 of cash on hand or in checking or savings accounts; or*
- 2. Your household's housing cost (rent/mortgage and utilities) are more than your monthly gross income and cash on hand or in checking or savings accounts; or*
- 3. You are a migrant or seasonal farmworker household with less than \$100 in checking or savings and your income stopped, or your income has started but you do not expect to get more than \$25 in the next ten days.*

Posting signs in the lobby of the CWD and providing clear information of what ES is and how to qualify for ES entitlement, how to apply, and what the application timeframe standard is for receiving benefits can be very helpful to someone that is applying for benefits for the first time.

Through workgroup discussion, a suggestion was made about a possible chat feature or pop-up audio screen for online applicants to meet the “orally” informing requirement. The aforementioned information on the half sheet can be added to the online application to stress the importance of providing information regarding ES entitlement to the applicant.

Application Processing

Another concern raised by the workgroup members is the ability to contact those individuals that apply online that do not provide a phone number to contact them right away for a scheduled interview. The workgroup members recommended some helpful hints to assist the CWDs in ensuring that the applicant provides as much information on their application as possible. One idea was to have pop-up windows on their online applications to remind and inform the applicant that he/she has forgotten to provide information regarding one of the ES criteria and/or their contact information.

Regarding mailing address, it was suggested that the decision about where to receive notices should be at the discretion of the applicant. The county should assist the applicant with this issue, but the type of address that the applicant wants to use should originate with the applicant and not the county.

Most workgroup participants agreed that, if the CWD can see the client for an interview on the same day, they should do so. To facilitate this process, the CWD should inform the client that they will be interviewed that day prior to completing and submitting the application. CWDs are encouraged to do same day interviews for applicants entitled for ES to ensure the three day ES timeframe is met. Such action would also eliminate the need for the applicant having to come back to the office the next day or wait for a phone interview. If the applicant has received CalFresh benefits in the same county before, it is possible that the CWD already has enough information to issue benefits within the three day timeframe.

Agency Conference

The workgroup recommended the “agency conference” be defined as “the applicant’s right to speak to a supervisor or the county director if they disagree with the county’s determination of non-entitlement for ES.”

A workgroup member shared CWDs recommendation for informing the applicant of entitlement or non-entitlement for ES. When the county contacts the applicant by telephone to schedule an interview, the EW will provide the household with their date and time of their initial scheduled interview. The EW will also explain to the applicant that based on how the questions were answered on the application, it determines what application process standard the application will be processed under (ES or normal processing timeframes). If found not ES entitled, the EW will explain to the applicant the reason(s) why they are not entitled for ES processing and if the applicant is not satisfied with the information received, they can ask to speak to a supervisor, which would then constitute a request for an agency conference. Note that the applicant expressing disagreement with the decision of non-entitlement for ES can constitute a request for an agency conference.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact your CalFresh county contact person or the CalFresh Policy Bureau at (916) 654-1896.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

TODD R. BLAND, Deputy Director
Welfare to Work Division