

**DSS ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER NO. ECONOMIC AND FAMILY SERVICES 2-2013
(Work First)**

TO: COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

ATTENTION: Work First Program Managers and Supervisors

DATE: May 29, 2013

SUBJECT: TANF State Plan and NC FAST Policy Implementation

EFFECTIVE DATE: June 1, 2013, unless otherwise noted

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The purpose of this letter is to provide new and updated policies related to the implementation of the 2010-2013 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) State Plan, the Integrated Eligibility Initiative, electronic benefit payments and the North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST) automated case management system for Project 2 & 6 (Work First, Medicaid, Special Assistance and Refugee Assistance).

NC FAST will begin the deployment of Project 2 & 6; Eligibility Information System (EIS) in June 2013. Project 2 & 6 will use a Soft Launch/Hard Launch approach similar to the deployment approach used for Project 1. The Project 2 & 6 Soft Launch approach will enable county eligibility workers to familiarize themselves with NC FAST functionality for Project 2 & 6 program prior to full conversion of cases for the EIS legacy system. During Hard Launch, active cases in the EIS legacy system will be converted to NC FAST. EIS case data will become 'read only' for Work First, Medicaid, Special Assistance and Refugee Assistance programs.

II. POLICY PROCEDURES

A. Job Bonus

Job Bonus is given to families when they obtain work to assist with their transition from Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) to employment.

1. Job Bonus will be awarded to participants whose new earned income causes their WFFA to terminate. The employment may be more or less than 20 hours a week as long as it is considered new, permanent and earnings received result in the participant being ineligible to receive WFFA.
2. Counties may no longer apply the 100% Job Bonus income disregard. The Job Bonus is a standard \$100.00 payment per month for three consecutive months regardless of the case status or employment status. If the participants' new earnings change before the end of the three month Job Bonus period, the participant may reapply for WFFA. Once a Job Bonus is applied, even if received for less than three months, the family has met their lifetime limit.

3. Job Bonus cases processed in the Eligibility Information System (EIS) will continue to receive the payment amount established by the EIS automated budget. As counties transition to NC FAST, cases processed in NC FAST will receive the Job Bonus payment of \$100.00.
4. Job Bonus cannot be applied during the application processing period. Applicants for WFFA are not eligible to receive Job Bonus. Job Bonus only applies to participants in an ongoing WFFA case.
5. For Work First Benefit (WFB) cases, the Job Bonus is not issued until after compliance with the Mutual Responsibility Agreement Plan of Action, unless there is good cause. Participants are not eligible to receive Job Bonus during the Job Quit penalty period or if the case is closed.
6. Job Bonus can be received once in a lifetime for each WFFA household and individual that becomes employed. However, if the adult members on the WFFA case change, the adult household member may be eligible to receive an additional Job Bonus period.

Example #1: A two parent family receives Job Bonus. Parent A becomes employed and their income terminates the family from WFFA. If Parent B becomes employed, the family is ineligible for Job Bonus because they have previously received Job Bonus.

Example #2: Parent B from Example #1 moves out of the home and begins living with Parent C and their child. Parent C obtains employment and their new earned income terminates the family from WFFA. Parent C may receive Job Bonus because the family composition changed and Parent C never received a Job Bonus.

Example #3: Parent B becomes employed while living with Parent C from Example #2 and Parent C never received Job Bonus. Although the family composition changed, the family is ineligible for Job Bonus because Parent B previously received Job Bonus.

7. The worker must have the participant sign the [DSS-8222](#), Work First Family Assistance Job Bonus Waiver, acknowledging they have accepted or declined the Job Bonus. If the participant chooses to decline the Job Bonus; the worker must terminate the WFFA case by issuing a [DSS-8110](#). In the future, if a participant's earned income terminates their WFFA case, they may receive Job Bonus if previously declined.

B. 60 Month State Time Clock for Custodial Parents

All cases that have a custodial parent (biological parent, adoptive parent or stepparent) living in the home and are not included in the WFFA case, will be subject to a 60 month State lifetime limit of assistance in North Carolina. Parents who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are excluded from this policy.

1. The 60 Month State time clock is applicable only for months of assistance received in North Carolina. Months of assistance received in another state do not count towards the 60 Month State time clock. The 60 Month state lifetime limit is a cumulative total of assistance received in North Carolina.
2. If a custodial parent previously not included becomes eligible to be included on the case, the 60 Month State time clock must stop and the 60 Month Federal time clock

begins. The 60 Month Federal and 60 Month State time clocks are tracked separately and do not run simultaneously.

3. The 60 month State time clock does not apply to ongoing cases in EIS where the custodial parent is in the home and not included on the WFFA case. If the family continues to meet all eligibility requirements, they are not subject to the 60 Month State time clock. The 60 Month State time clock will begin for the family at their next review during soft and hard launch of NC FAST. If an ongoing case terminates and the participant reapplies and the county has implemented NC FAST, the 60 Month State time clock will begin for the family.
4. Families will be notified via, the [DSS-8220-C](#), Timely Notice of Pending Termination, once they have 58 months of tracking on the 60 Month State time clock. Workers should follow the same policy and procedures outlined in Work First Policy Section 105 Federal and State Time Limits to grant appeals and hardship extensions.

C. Emergency Assistance

Applicants must meet the additional eligibility requirements as well as those outlined/written in the county's Emergency Assistance policy. These additional requirements ensure processes and standards established for families are equitable, consistent and allow for the most efficient use of funding.

1. Counties must choose to serve families at 150% or 200% of the FPL. Federal Poverty Levels other than those shown above are not allowed when determining eligibility.
2. Families must meet the resource limits as defined for Work First Family Assistance. Accept the family's statement unless the statement is questionable.

The procedures to determine eligibility for Emergency Assistance are described in each county's administrative processes. Counties must incorporate the additional eligibility requirements into their current policy and procedures. The revised documents must be on file in the county and available for monitoring and review.

D. Work First Services for Families At or Below 200% of Poverty

Applicants for Work First Services for Families at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) must meet the following additional eligibility requirements as well as those outlined/written in the county's Work First Services policy. The additional requirements ensure processes and standards established for families are equitable, consistent and allow for the most efficient use of funding.

1. Counties must choose to serve families at 150% or 200% of the FPL. Federal Poverty Levels other than those shown above are not allowed when determining eligibility for Work First services.
2. Families must meet the resource limits as defined for Work First Family Assistance. Accept the family's statement unless the statement is questionable.
3. Individuals cannot be included in the need standard when:
 - a. The individual has with an Intentional Program Violation (IPV)

- b. Fleeing to avoid prosecution of a felony (or a high misdemeanor in New Jersey); **or**
- c. Fleeing to avoid custody either before or after conviction of a crime that is a felony (or a high misdemeanor in New Jersey); **or**
- d. Violating a condition of probation or parole under federal or State law as determined by a court; **or**
- e. Convicted on or after August 23, 1996, under federal or State law of any offense committed on or after August 23, 1996, which is classified as a felony by the jurisdiction involved and has as an element the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance. This does not apply to individuals convicted of Class H or I controlled substance abuse felony offenses in North Carolina.

Workers must accept the family's statement that no family members meet any of the conditions listed above; except for verification of an individual's status as a Class H or I controlled substance felony. Follow the process outlined in Work First Manual Section [104A](#), Individual Criminal Violations. Use the [DSS-5271](#), Individual Criminal Violations Declaration Statement, to document the family's statement.

Workers may utilize the [DSS-6963-C](#), Mutual Responsibility Agreement- Part C to assist in developing a self-sufficiency plan for adults receiving 200% Services. The worker cannot apply sanctions for non-compliance with the MRA-C for Work First Services for Families At or Below 200% of Poverty.

Counties must incorporate the additional eligibility requirements into their current policy and procedures. The revised documents must be on file in the county and available for monitoring and review.

E. Transferring Cases

Work First Family Assistance cases will transfer if the applicant/participant moves to another county. The WFFA case will not terminate and the applicant/participant is not required to reapply in the new county of residence.

1. For pending applications and ongoing cases, the worker will use the [DSS-8146A](#), Notice of Information Needed to Determine Your Eligibility for WFFA, to request verification of the address change, household composition, or any additional actions or verifications required. The worker should set a deadline of no less than twelve calendar days for the applicant to complete the actions or provide the verifications.
2. If an applicant/participant moves to another county before the application is processed, the worker in the original county must continue to process the application. Once the case is approved, it will transfer to the participants' new county of residence effective the following month.
3. The originating county is responsible for keying participation hours, issuing the cash assistance payment for the month the move occurred and/or completing pending re-certifications prior to transferring cases.
4. The case will transfer to the new county effective the following month the worker was notified of the change of address.

5. The applicant/participant must contact the new county of residence before the effective month to notify the worker of the address change. The receiving county must reassess the participant and establish a new MRA based on county resources within 5 work days of the date the case is received in NC FAST. Counties should use their discretion to make a determination of good cause and issue the benefits during the transfer case transition period. If the applicant/participant fails to comply without good cause, the receiving county must complete the [DSS- 8110](#), Notice of Benefits to terminate the case.
6. If a case was approved in NC FAST and the receiving county has not soft launched, a designated NC FAST administrator will manage the transferred case. If a case was approved in EIS, and the applicant/participant moves to a county that has implemented NC FAST, the case must be processed in EIS during the soft launch period. EIS cases will follow policy outlined in Work First Manual Section [204](#), Change in County Residence.

F. Benefit Diversion

1. Counties have the option to offer Benefit Diversion to applicants for WFFA. All counties notified the Division of Social Services of their decision to offer or not to offer Benefit Diversion to Work First applicants for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2013-2014. Counties that chose to offer Benefit Diversion must follow Work First Manual Section [102.1](#), Short Term Benefits and Services. Benefit Diversion will continue to be monitored by the Division. If services are provided differently than reported it will result in a monitoring finding and a potential County Responsible Overpayment (CROP).
2. Counties may amend their decision to offer Benefit Diversion each SFY by providing written notification to the Division. This is to ensure that all applicants are provided equal opportunity to receive benefits and services under the Work First program.
3. Individuals cannot be included in the need standard when:
 - a. The individual has with an Intentional Program Violation (IPV)
 - b. Fleeing to avoid prosecution of a felony (or a high misdemeanor in New Jersey); **or**
 - c. Fleeing to avoid custody either before or after conviction of a crime that is a felony (or a high misdemeanor in New Jersey); **or**
 - d. Violating a condition of probation or parole under federal or State law as determined by a court; **or**
 - e. Convicted on or after August 23, 1996, under federal or State law of any offense committed on or after August 23, 1996, which is classified as a felony by the jurisdiction involved and has as an element the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance. This does not apply to individuals convicted of Class H or I controlled substance abuse felony offenses in North Carolina.

Workers must accept the family's statement that no family members meet any of the conditions listed above, except for verification of an individual's status as a Class H or I controlled substance felony. Follow the process outlined in Work First Manual Section [104A](#), Individual Criminal Violations. Use the [DSS-5271](#), Individual Criminal Violations Declaration Statement, to document the family's statement.

G. Integrated Eligibility

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) economic benefits programs, Medicaid, Food and Nutrition Services, Work First, Refugee, Energy, Subsidized Child Care and State/County Special Assistance, share similar standards for reporting and verifying personal and financial information to establish or maintain eligibility. The economic benefits programs have undertaken the Integrated Eligibility Initiative in order to streamline eligibility determination for individuals and families applying for and receiving economic benefits.

The Integrated Eligibility workgroup consolidated, aligned, reduced and simplified the long list of income types currently being collected by programs. The first integrated policy resulting from this ongoing collaboration is a unified policy for the treatment of income.

H. Electronic Benefit Issuance

As counties begin the implementation of NC FAST benefit payments for the Work First, Special Assistance including SA In-Home and Refugee Programs will transition from paper checks to electronic benefit issuance. This process will begin with the NC FAST pilot counties and will continue over the months as all counties transition into NC FAST. Information regarding the procedures for implementing electronic benefit issuance is forthcoming.

III. IMPLEMENTATION INSTRUCTIONS

All 100 counties will experience a Soft launch period, during which the EIS legacy system will be available to process benefits for active Medicaid, Work First, Special Assistance, and Refugee Assistance cases. During the Soft Launches, staff will be required to use NC FAST to enter all new applications for clients who either are on a closed EIS case or are unknown to the EIS system and/or the state of North Carolina. During Hard Launch, active cases in the EIS legacy system will be converted to NC FAST. EIS case data will then become 'read-only' and all cases will be processed using NC FAST.

Applications for WFFA that include individuals who are currently active in EIS (for example on a Medicaid case) at the time of application will be taken in EIS and the "AAF" case will be maintained in EIS until the final phase of Project 2 & 6.

With the implementation of NC FAST, Standard and Electing counties will follow Standard eligibility requirements as outlined in the Work First Manual during soft and hard launch of NC FAST.

See the specific policies listed above and Section IV. Effective Dates for all other implementation instructions.

IV. EFFECTIVE DATE

Apply these policies at next application, review or change in situation based upon the following effective dates.

The following policies are effective June 1, 2013.

- a. Emergency Assistance
- b. Work First Services for Families at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level

The following policies are effective as counties implement Project 2 & 6 of the NC FAST case management system, as of the initial phase of new applications taken in NC FAST and upon the final phase of implementation for all cases.

- a. Job Bonus
- b. Transfer of WFFA cases
- c. 60 Month State Time Clock
- d. Electronic Benefit Issuance

The following policy is effective July 1, 2013; Benefit Diversion.

Additional information is forthcoming regarding the transition from paper checks to direct deposit.

Please email any questions regarding this policy to WorkFirst.Support@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,



David Locklear, Assistant Chief
Economic and Family Services
Division of Social Services

DL/wf

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