

**THIS LETTER APPLIES TO THE FOLLOWING COUNTIES ONLY:**

Ashe County Columbus County Person County Scotland County

Chatham County Edgecombe County Robeson County Vance County

Cleveland County Lenoir County Rutherford County

**DSS ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER NO. ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE 11-2002**

**(Food Stamps)**

**TO:** County Directors of Social Services

**ATTENTION:** Food Stamp Supervisors

**DATE:** September 27, 2002

**RE:** ABAWD Three-Month Exemption

**EFFECTIVE**

**DATE:** October 1, 2002

**I. BACKGROUND**

The Food Stamp Program requires able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDS) from the ages of 18 through 49 to participate in work activities as a condition of eligibility. These physically and mentally fit individuals are restricted to receiving food stamp benefits for a period of three months within a 36-month period, unless the individual is exempt or meets minimum work requirements as described below:

- A. Works an average of 20 hours per week (80 hours per month);
- B. Actively works in a Workfare program;
- C. Participates or complies with a work program at least 20 hours per week; **or**
- D. Works and participates in a work program for a combined total of at least 20 hours per week.

As a result of high unemployment caused by layoffs and plant closings in many North Carolina counties, ABAWDS are having difficulty locating employment or suitable work activity to retain eligibility for food stamp benefits. The Division of Social Services submitted a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Agriculture

that will allow some ABAWDS to receive food stamp benefits longer than the current three months within the 36-month period without meeting the 80-hour work rule. Under North Carolina's waiver request, ABAWDS living in the counties identified above can receive benefits longer than the three-month period provided all other eligibility requirements are met. The waiver criteria stipulates that ABAWDS must be living in counties that are located in a Labor Surplus Area or in counties with an average unemployment rate of more than 10%.

## **II. POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

North Carolina's waiver has been approved and, as a result, the time limit on food stamp benefits as outlined in Section 245 of the Food Stamp Manual no longer applies in the waiver counties. In the affected counties, households containing an ABAWD can now be certified longer than three months. Work registration requirements are still applicable under the waiver, and employment and training (E&T) requirements and sanctions for non-compliance continue to apply.

The exemption applies to each of the identified counties above for one year. The Division's E&T Program staff will reevaluate county exemption status in September 2003.

Counties must manually report each month the number of ABAWDs that have received more than three full months of food stamp benefits. The attached form must be completed and faxed to the E&T Program Manager by the 14<sup>th</sup> of the following month at (919) 733-0645.

## **III. IMPLEMENTATION INSTRUCTIONS**

Effective October 1, 2002, at each application, recertification, and change in situation, manually track each ABAWD beginning with the fourth full free month of benefits. Each month the ABAWD receives food stamp benefits past the three full months should be recorded on the monthly report.

At each application, recertification, and change in situation in a food stamp case where there is an ABAWD whose dependent relationship code is J and the person had previously complied with the work requirements, add the ABAWD back to the food stamp case. Change the dependent relationship code (field 80K) to I, and use the appropriate work registration code (field 80E) on the DSS-8590. Re-register the ABAWD with ESC using the NCSES-2624, if appropriate.

Apply this policy to all applications, recertifications, and changes processed October 1, 2002, or after.

If you have any questions concerning the policy contained in this letter, please contact your Program Integrity Representative.

Sincerely,

Wilbert R. Morris, Chief

Economic Independence Section

WRM/dp

Attachment

[Report Form](#)