

**WASHINGTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES
POLICY STATEMENT REGARDING ‘HARDSHIP’ AND
‘GOOD CAUSE’ EXEMPTIONS FROM OWF TIME LIMITS**

Under O.R.C. § 5107.18, a County Department of Job and Family Services can declare up to twenty percent (20%) of its average caseload during the prior Federal Fiscal Year to be under a “hardship” and grant such Assistance Groups an exemption in order to continue assistance. Prior to the expiration of an Assistance Group’s thirty-six (36) months of assistance, the Assistance Group will be reviewed to determine potential eligibility for a hardship exemption. Additionally, any Assistance Group whose thirty-six (36) months of eligibility has expired will be reviewed to determine potential eligibility upon the Assistance Group’s application for a hardship exemption. Washington County DJFS, at its sole discretion, will extend benefits to not more than twenty percent (20%) of its average caseload under the circumstances described below, and in no case will benefits be extended for more than sixty (60) months (including, but not limited to, hardship exemptions and/or good cause extensions as provided in O.R.C. § 5107.18).

The Washington County Department of Job and Family Services (WCDJFS) has adopted the following criteria for determining whether an Assistance Group may qualify for a hardship exemption under O.R.C. § 5107.18.

Hardship exemptions are only available to Assistance Groups whose members have complied with all aspects of the self-sufficiency contract, and who meet all other requirements for OWF cash assistance except for the expiration of the thirty-six (36) month time limit.

Assistance Groups receiving an exemption must continue to abide by the provisions of the self-sufficiency contract.

An Assistance Group which includes an adult or minor head-of-household who has participated in Ohio Works First (OWF) for thirty-six (36) months while head-of-household or while married to the head-of-household may be eligible for a “hardship exemption” if one (1) or more of the following circumstances exists:

1. The Assistance Group’s adult or minor head-of-household who has exhausted eligibility is a victim of domestic violence who can verify that he or she is actively seeking help from an established support provider which currently prevents him or her from pursuing, obtaining and/or maintaining employment. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months.
2. The Assistance Group’s adult or minor head-of-household who has exhausted eligibility is enrolled in and has completed at least one-half (½) of an educational or training program which is directly related to, and will prepare the individual for, an employment opportunity, and the individual remains enrolled and in good standing as determined by the educational or training institution. The education or training program must, by itself or in combination with the assignments, meet the individual’s work participation requirement. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months to complete the program.

3. The Assistance Group's adult or minor head-of-household who has exhausted eligibility is unable to secure employment, and the unemployment rate for Washington County as reported by the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) is continuously at a rate greater than ten percent (10%) for three (3) months prior to the month in which eligibility for participation of the Assistance Group will expire. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months, or until the unemployment rate for Washington County drops below ten percent (10%), whichever is shorter.

4. The presence of the Assistance Group's adult or minor head-of-household who has exhausted eligibility is medically necessary to provide care for a disabled immediate family member (i.e., child, spouse, parent, sibling) living in the same household and no other supportive services are available. The medical necessity of the individual's presence to provide care must be verified by a physician's statement on a designated form, and the medical necessity of the individual's presence must prevent the individual from pursuing, obtaining, and/or maintaining employment. WCDJFS reserves the right to secure a second opinion from a medical provider of its choice and at its expense. In the event the second opinion conflicts with the original physician's statement, WCDJFS may secure and rely upon a third opinion from a medical provider of its choice and at its expense. Such third opinion shall be final and binding. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months.

5. The Assistance Group's adult or minor head-of-household who has exhausted eligibility has a serious physical or mental illness or condition which renders him or her incapacitated for employment. The incapacity must be verified by a physician and the individual must be in the process of applying for SSI/SSD benefits except that individuals whose illness or condition is temporary and is not expected to last for more than twelve (12) months need not apply for SSI/SSD benefits. WCDJFS reserves the right to secure a second opinion from a medical provider or other competent professional of its choice. In the event the second opinion conflicts with the original verification, WCDJFS may secure and rely upon a third opinion from a medical provider or other competent professional of its choice. Such third opinion shall be final and binding. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption for the duration of the application process or until the end of the temporary incapacity, up to a maximum of six (6) months.

6. The Assistance Group's adult or minor head-of-household who has exhausted eligibility, through no fault of his or her own, is unable to procure child care services, the WCDJFS is also unable to provide child care services, and the lack of child care prevents him or her from pursuing, obtaining and/or maintaining employment. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months, or until such time as childcare arrangements are found, whichever is shorter.

7. The Assistance Group's adult or minor head-of-household who has exhausted eligibility is unable to work due to participation in an approved residential drug and alcohol dependency rehabilitation program. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption for the duration of the rehabilitation program, up to a maximum of six (6) months.

8. The Assistance Group's adult or minor head-of-household who has exhausted eligibility loses his or her employment due to a natural disaster which causes the individual's employer to close. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months, or until employment is found,

whichever is shorter.

Assistance Groups qualifying for a hardship exemption under these criteria will be evaluated on a monthly basis to determine if the hardship exemption is still applicable.

An Assistance Group which exhausts its initial exemption and which still meets the criteria for a hardship exemption may re-apply for an exemption. Such requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Extensions are not automatic, and again, extensions and/or exemptions may not exceed the cap of sixty (60) months of benefits.

The Washington County Department of Job and Family Services reserves the right to amend the above criteria. Should the Washington County Department of Job and Family Services determine that these criteria should be amended, such amendments will be approved by the County Commissioners prior to their effective date whenever practical.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services continually monitors the percentage of the average monthly number of Ohio Works First participants in each county that are granted hardship exemptions. Once a county department's exemptions equal or exceed eighteen percent (18%), the state department will immediately notify the county department. Upon notification from the State that WCDJFS has met or exceeded eighteen percent (18%), or at any point prior to such notification when WCDJFS determines such review to be beneficial, WCDJFS will review all Assistance Groups receiving an exemption, to determine if any Assistance Groups no longer qualify for an exemption. Such review may be in addition to any regularly scheduled monthly review of individual Assistance Groups.

If, at any point, WCDJFS can no longer grant hardship exemptions to all qualifying Assistance Groups due to the operation of the twenty percent (20%) limitation, WCDJFS may amend, delete and/or add to any of the above criteria and/or may develop and implement alternative hardship criteria to address the situation.

This policy shall become effective as of the last signature date shown below.

SAMUEL COOK, President
Washington County Commissioners

DATE

SANDRA MATTHEWS
Washington County Commissioners

DATE

JOHN GRIMES
Washington County Commissioners

DATE

MICHAEL PAXTON, Director
Washington County DJFS

DATE

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

MICHAEL SPAHR
Washington County Prosecutor

DATE