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Federal Government Approves Ohio Works First Corrective Compliance Plan

COLUMBUS, OHIO – The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) has received federal approval for a corrective compliance plan that will bring Ohio’s cash assistance program into line with federal welfare-to-work requirements, avoid more than \$130 million in federal penalties, and put more Ohioans back to work.

“We have developed a cost-effective plan that will help those we serve find work and become self-sufficient,” said ODJFS Director Michael Colbert. “There is much work still to be done, but I want to thank my staff and the county JFS directors who have worked so hard to reach this point.”

Federal law requires most able-bodied adults enrolled in the Ohio Works First (OWF) cash assistance program to work at least 30 hours a week. States must show that at least 90 percent of adults in two-parent households and at least 50 percent of all adults are working the required number of hours.

Already, ODJFS has raised the OWF work participation rate from 26 percent in September 2010 to 33 percent in September 2011.

In January 2012, ODJFS will launch a statewide radio and television campaign to educate cash assistance beneficiaries about their work requirement. The public service announcement can be viewed here: <http://bit.ly/sd700s>.

As part of the corrective compliance plan:

- All OWF applicants will be required to complete a self-sufficiency assessment before receiving their initial assistance checks.
- Additional hearing officers will be hired to ensure timely hearings for OWF recipients who have been sanctioned for failing to meet work participation requirements.
- A new web-based time and attendance verification system will be developed, to make it easier for caseworkers to verify when work-eligible individuals complete work hours.

ODJFS is also launching Ohio Works Now, a temporary program that will provide a small additional benefit to eligible working families with children, allowing those families to be counted in the state's work participation rate. Ohio Works Now benefits will be food assistance benefits, not cash assistance benefits.

OWF provides a monthly cash benefit to about 205,000 Ohioans who earn no more than 50 percent of the federal poverty level. Recipients have children, and many earn less than \$7,000 per year.

