

ALLEN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES

PLAN FOR OWF HARDSHIP DETERMINATIONS

Section 5107.18 of the Revised Code limits participation in Ohio Works First (OWF) to 36 months and provides that a County Department of Job and Family Services may exempt not more than 20% of the average monthly number of OWF participants from the time limit due to hardship. The assistance group will have the opportunity to apply for a hardship determination, prior to or after the expiration of the assistance group's thirty-six (36) months of assistance. Each application will be reviewed to determine eligibility for a hardship exemption. Allen County Department of Job and Family Services, at its sole discretion, will extend benefits to not more than twenty percent (20%) of its average caseload.

APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION FROM THE 36 MONTH LIMIT

The assistance group member(s) may apply for a hardship exemption by submitting a hardship exemption application no earlier than the first day of the month of receipt of the thirty-fifth (35th) OWF cash assistance. Once an assistance group has received the 36th OWF cash benefit, the assistance group will not receive OWF cash benefits until an application for hardship exemption has been approved by ACDJFS. If the application is approved, the benefits will go back to the date of application.

ELIGIBILITY FOR EXEMPTION FROM THE 36 MONTH LIMIT

Prior to final approval, the assistance group member(s) must sign a self-sufficiency contract which will include an agreement to meet at least monthly with his/her casemanager. A thorough review of the assistance group's situation including progress toward self-sufficiency and verification of compliance with all assignments of the self-sufficiency contract will be made during the meetings with the casemanager and assistance group member(s). The exemption ceases when the reason for the exemption ceases to exist.

In order to be eligible for the exemption, the assistance group member(s) must have satisfactorily complied with his/her self-sufficiency contract or have not failed without good cause for the last twelve (12) months, meet OWF cash eligibility requirements, and **be able to verify at least one of the following conditions:**

- The single parent or caretaker in an assistance group is unable to participate in assigned work activities due to a physical or mental illness or condition, which renders him/her, incapacitated for employment. The incapacity must be verified by

a licensed physician or psychologist. The affected individual must cooperate with all aspects of the self-sufficiency contract which may include applying for SSI/SSD benefits. The ACDJFS reserves the right to secure and rely upon a second opinion, further testing, or evaluation by a physician, testing facility, or laboratory of the county's choice. Such an assistance group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months.

- The single parent or caretaker in an assistance group is providing care for a disabled immediate family member (limited to child, spouse, parent), living in the same household, and other acceptable arrangements for the disabled member's care are not available. The medical necessity of the individual's presence to provide care must be verified by a physician's statement. ACDJFS reserves the right to secure and rely upon a second opinion from a medical provider of its choice. Such an assistance group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months.
- An assistance group has a single custodial parent caring for his/her child living in the same household who is not yet 18 years old with severe chronic physical or mental health problems requiring special care, frequent hospitalizations or frequent visits to a physician's office. The assistance group must provide documentation of the illness, frequency of, and need for care and treatment. Such an assistance group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months.
- An assistance group has a teen parent head of household and has received less than 6 months of OWF cash assistance following the teen's receipt of a high school diploma or equivalent. The parent must be assigned to and be fulfilling his/her work activity requirements. Such an assistance group may receive an exemption of up to a maximum of six (6) months.
- The capacity of the single parent or caretaker in an assistance group to retain employment is being disrupted by domestic violence and the parent/caretaker is actively seeking help, as evidenced by residence in a spousal abuse shelter, a current protective court order, a police report or a sworn affidavit coupled with steps to resolve the situation (such as retention of an attorney). Such an assistance group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months.
- An assistance group's youngest parent or caretaker is over sixty-five (65) years of age and is a caretaker of a child who is not yet 6 years old. The parent or caretaker must be assigned to and fulfilling his/her work activity requirements.
- A single custodial parent is caring for a child who is not yet 6 years old and through no fault of his/her own, is unable to procure child care services, and the lack of child care prevents him/her from pursuing, obtaining and/or maintaining employment. The parent/caretaker must provide documentation from at least five (5) certified or licensed childcare providers indicating that childcare assistance was applied for and unavailable. Such an assistance group may receive an exemption limited to one (1) month.
- The parent or caretaker of an assistance group did not receive the benefit of participation in a work activity within the last 12 months and is unemployed. The adult caretaker must be performing any assignments listed on the self-sufficiency contract. Such an assistance group may receive an exemption of up to six (6) months.

If there is a failure of the self-sufficiency contract during the exemption period, a sanction may be imposed if good cause is not established as defined by the county in the STEPS Program Packet.

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.**

If and when the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services notifies the Allen County Department of Job and Family Services that exceeding the 20% tolerance is imminent, continued assistance will be given in a priority ranking according to those who qualify for the hardship criteria listed first in this policy. Priority ranking will lower through each succeeding criteria until the last criteria listed receives the lowest priority. When not all assistance groups in any priority group can be given assistance due to the implementation of the 20% limitation, priority within that group will be given to those who have received the least number of months of OWF assistance under a hardship exemption.