

Lake County Department of Job and Family Services
Ohio Works First Hardship Exemption Criteria
Revised April 15, 2001

The Lake County Department of Job and Family Services, in compliance with Sec 5107.18(E) of the Ohio Revised Code, is responsible for establishing Hardship Exemption Criteria to allow no more than 20 % (annually determined) of eligible participants from the Ohio Works First (OWF) program who have exhausted their 36 month lifetime assistance limits to continue to receive OWF cash assistance. The Department will advise all OWF participants in Lake County of the Hardship Exemption Criteria and the application process for the Hardship Exemption 3 months prior to the anticipated expiration of their 36 month life time cash assistance limit.

In order to obtain and maintain a Hardship Exemption, the OWF participant must:

- 1) Make application for a Hardship Exemption.
- 2) Provide all documentation requested by the department to establish whether a hardship condition may exist.
- 3) Comply with all OWF eligibility requirements
- 4) In two parent assistance groups, both parent/caretakers must meet the criteria of a Hardship Exemption.

If a participant applies for a assistance after exhaustion of their 36 months of lifetime assistance, they must also request and complete a hardship application, and their OWF application will remain in pending status until a hardship determination is made by the department thru review of the Hardship Exemption Review Panel.

Failure to comply with all OWF eligibility requirements will result in termination of OWF. Failure to comply with the Self-Sufficiency Plan established between the participant and the agency will result in the imposition of a sanction levied at the next appropriate level based on any previous sanctions imposed on the participant.

The Hardship Exemption criteria established by the Department does not represent any guarantees of future assistance, continued assistance, or future right to review once the Hardship Exemption is lost. If the Department determines that the Hardship has been remedied, no further exemption will be given and assistance will be terminated.

The Department will establish a Hardship Exemption Review Panel. Members will include: a Children Protective Services Administrator, Child Care Supervisor, and the Ohio Works First Administrator or Assistant Director. The panel will review each application to determine whether the participant's employment barriers meet a condition as specified in the Hardship Exemption criteria. Such evaluation will begin 60 days prior to the anticipated expiration of the participant's lifetime assistance limit for current recipients, and as part of the application process for

households headed by caretakers who have previously exhausted their 36 months of lifetime OWF assistance. The review will be conducted by evaluating the application, supporting documentation and the case record. The panel may request that the assigned Eligibility Worker contact the participant to obtain further documentation. No final determination will be made until the 36th month of cash assistance for current recipients.

The Hardship Exemption Administrative Review Panel will reevaluate any cases receiving a Hardship Exemption every 6 months, or at the request of the assigned Eligibility Worker based upon changes in the case situation or documentation received.

The following criteria will be utilized, in descending order, to determine potential Hardship Exemption. If the allowable Hardship Exemption slots have been reached, the Department reserves the right to terminate the Hardship Exemption for the criteria, determined by this Department to be less severe as based on our descending order of criteria as listed below. **The Lake County Department of Job and Family Services maintains total right and discretion to manage the exemption slots available for Lake County, and to deny or terminate an Exemption as is necessary to remain within compliance with ORC 5107.18(E):**

- 1) Mental Health conditions documented by a Psychiatrist or Psychologist that make the participant unemployable as determined by the Department. The participant is in compliance with their Self Sufficiency Plan including compliance with any recommended treatment and as necessary is pursuing Social Security Disability Benefits.
- 2) Special medical conditions of a child, as documented by a Physician, that does not allow the child to be cared for in an available licenced child care facility and the participant is in compliance with their Self Sufficiency Plan.
- 3) Completion of Ohio Rehabilitative Services Commission (ORSC/BVR) evaluation, remediation or training necessary to determine work incapacity or retrain the participant. If the evaluation by ORSC/BVR indicates that there is no remediation that will make employment possible, or that employment is limited to 20 hours per week or less for the participant, and the participant is in compliance with their Self Sufficiency Plan, hardship will be granted while efforts continue to pursue Social Security Disability Assistance.
- 4) Employed individuals with physical or mental health handicaps or conditions documented by a Physician who are working to their capacity as documented by an appropriate professional evaluation, and determined by the Department, and whose income after appropriate earned income disregards, allows for continued OWF cash eligibility and who are in compliance with their Self Sufficiency Plan.

- 5) Substance Abuse dependency rendering the participant unemployable, as documented by a Certified Chemical Dependency Counselor III, Psychologist or Psychiatrist and for which the participant is in active treatment and a designated treatment termination date has been established. The determination that such condition renders the participant unemployable remains at the sole discretion of the Department.
- 6) Transportation barriers as determined by the Department for which the participant has been unable to address through public transportation services, in that the applicant is resides more than two (2) miles from public transportation, the utilization of the Prevention Retention and Contingency (PRC) Program or other resources identified by the Eligibility Worker. Such evaluation will explore whether the participant's inaction or choice not to access PRC or other resources is a factor in the continuation of a transportation barrier.
- 7) Current extraordinary circumstances whereby the imposition of the time limits would prevent the OWF participant from completing the activities needed to become employed. The Hardship Exemption Administrative Review Panel will have full discretion to determine if these circumstances make the participant unemployable.