

**LORAIN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES  
OWF HARDSHIP EXEMPTION POLICY**

Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services, in compliance with Sec. 5107.18(E) of the Ohio Revised Code, is responsible to establish hardship criteria to allow no more than 20% (to be established annually) of the participants from the Ohio Works First program who have exhausted their 36 month lifetime cash assistance limits to continue to receive OWF cash assistance. Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services will advise the participant three months prior to the anticipated expiration of their cash assistance that they may apply for a hardship exemption, and what the hardship exemption criteria for Lorain County are.

In order to obtain and maintain a hardship exemption, the OWF participant must: 1) make application for a hardship exemption and 2) continue to comply with all requirements of Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services through the self-sufficiency contract. **Once accepted as a hardship exemption, failure to comply with the self-sufficiency contract established between the participant and the Agency will result in the application of the appropriate sanctions and penalties.**

The hardship exemption criteria established by Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services does not represent any guarantee of future assistance, continued assistance, or future right to review once the hardship exemption is lost. If Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services determines that the hardship has been remedied, and if no other hardship exemption exists, assistance will be terminated.

Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services will utilize an application review panel. The members will be the Employment Services Counselor for the case, the Ohio Works First Supervisor, the Ohio Works First Administrator, and the Social Services Administrator. The recommendation of the review panel will be reviewed by the Director, or designee, for final determination. 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 with the caseworker ninety days prior to the anticipated expiration of the participant lifetime cash assistance limit. The caseworker will ensure that supporting documentation of the possible is obtained prior to the panel review. The panel review will be conducted by reviewing the application and case record, as well as any other documentation provided. The panel may request that the assigned worker contact the participant to obtain additional documentation. No final determination will be made until the 36<sup>th</sup> month of cash assistance.

The evaluation panel will reevaluate any cases receiving a hardship exemption within 30 days prior to the expiration of the extension, or earlier at the request of the assigned worker based on changes in the case situation or documentation received.

The following criteria will be utilized, in descending order, to determine potential hardship. If the allowable hardship slots have been reached, Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services reserves the right to end the hardship exemption for the criteria that is less severe based on the descending order of the criteria listed below. **It is understood that all participants in that class of exemption shall lose the extension of OWF cash benefits, unless the participant meets another higher priority exemption. Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services maintains total right and discretion to amend and manage the hardship exemption slots available for Lorain County, and to deny or terminate a hardship exemption as is necessary to remain in compliance with ORC 5107.18(E):**

1. The Assistance Group contains a child with a medical condition which requires special care as documented by a physician. No appropriate child care is available as documented by the Child Care Unit Supervisor.
2. The individual is currently unable to participate in work activities to become self-sufficient due to a physical or mental incapacity that is documented by a physician.
3. The individual has been unable to participate in assigned work activities for a sufficient time to gain self-sufficiency due to a physical or mental incapacity that was verified by a physician. The individual must be currently participating..
4. The individual is enrolled in an education or training program directly related to employment which will not be completed by the thirty-six-month time limit. This hardship exemption can only be for a maximum of four months. If the program is not completed within four months, the individual may apply for additional months through the PRC program, but may not exceed one quarter/semester combined.
5. The individual or assistance group is active with the Children Service Bureau and is working toward reunification or has a treatment plan which requires the parent's full participation to ensure the health and safety of a child(ren.).
6. The individual is providing care for a disabled spouse or parent living in the household, and it is documented no other acceptable arrangements for the disabled member's care are available. The member's disability must be documented by a physician.
7. The individual is employed with a documented disability and is working up to his capacity. With the appropriate earned income disregards the individual may remain cash eligible.

8. The individual or family member(s) is a victim of domestic violence which currently affects the individual's ability to become self-sufficient.
9. The individual has a substance abuse problem which currently makes him unemployable. The individual is participating in a treatment program and agrees to continue treatment.
10. The individual is single and is in the third trimester of pregnancy. Only one lifetime exemption for this reason.
11. The individual is a single custodial parent with a child under three months of age. Only one lifetime exemption for this reason.
12. The individual is not employed or is employed with wages which would render him cash eligible were it not for the time limits and has not been given the opportunity to participate in a work activity leading to self-sufficiency for the last twelve months
13. The individual has extraordinary circumstances whereby the imposition of the time limits to the case would prevent COMPLETION of the activities needed to reach a level of economic self support. The review panel will have full discretion to determine if these circumstances make the participant unemployable.
14. An individual who has not cooperated with the Agency in pursuing self-sufficiency may be approved for four months of exemption providing that the individual cooperates with the self-sufficiency contract. Failure to cooperate will result in the loss of the exemption.