

Mahoning County Department of Human Services

Ohio Works First Hardship Criteria

The Mahoning County Department of Human Services (the Department), in compliance with Section 5107.18 (E) of the Ohio Revised Code, is responsible for establishing hardship criteria for Ohio Works First (OWF) participants. The hardship exemption allows a maximum of 20% (determined annually) of the Ohio Works First participants who have exhausted the thirty-six (36) month time limit continue to receive cash assistance by meeting one or more of the hardship criteria. The Department will notify participants thirty (30) days prior to the anticipated expiration of OWF cash benefits. The notice will inform them of the criteria for hardship exemption and the process for requesting consideration for the exemption.

In order to apply for a hardship exemption, the OWF participant must

- 1) Make application for a hardship exemption no later than twenty (20) days from the mailing date of the notification letter

- 2) continue to comply with all of the requirements of the Department through the Self-Sufficiency Contract

If the hardship exemption is granted, the participant must then continue to comply with the Self-Sufficiency Contract established between the participant and the Department. Failure to do so will result in the loss of the hardship exemption and termination of the assistance and once lost or removed, it cannot be reinstated. The hardship exemption is only available to OWF recipients and does not represent any guarantee of continued assistance, future assistance or future right to review. When the Department determines that the hardship ceases to exist, no further exemption will be given and assistance will be terminated.

The Review Team

The Department shall create a hardship exemption application review team. The members will consist of the Adult Services Administrator, the Employment Services Administrator, and the Quality Improvement/Training Administrator. The team will review each application in order to determine whether the applicant's hardship meets the condition(s) as specified in the exemption criteria. The review will include the application and the case record. The team reserves the right to request additional information that may be needed to make a determination. No final determination will be made until the thirty-sixth (36) month of OWF cash assistance has lapsed. The review team shall review eligibility for all cases receiving a hardship exemption at least every six (6) months.

The Hardship Criteria

The following criteria shall be applied to determine whether a potential hardship exists. The criteria are listed in descending order of significance, resulting with consideration being given to more severe hardships depending on the number of exemption slots available. If allotted slots have been filled, the Department reserves the right to end hardship exemption for the criteria that is less severe based on the descending criteria that follows. Mahoning County Department of Human Services maintains total right and discretion to manage the exemptions slots available for the county, and to deny or terminate an exemption as necessary to maintain compliance with ORC 5107.18 (E).

A hardship exemption will be granted to those families eligible for such exemption only when the family's net income (income after standard deductions) is less than the OWF payment standard.

- 1) A participant with a documented mental or physical disability as determined by the vocational/rehabilitation assessment performed by the rehabilitation services unit of Saint Elizabeth's medical center and whose disability prevents employment. If the disability can be alleviated so that employment is possible, the hardship exemption will last only until the participant is determined able to work.
- 2) A participant who is required to care for another adult or child who are disabled and reside in the home, for whom there is no alternative source of care (waiver services, Visiting Nurses, Hospice, etc.)
- 3) A participant who is aged fifty (50) years or older and who has had no employment within the previous ten (10) years
- 4) A participant who is cooperating with the Department in fulfilling their Self Sufficiency contract goals but is not in employment that provides sufficient income to cause the family to lose cash assistance had they remained eligible for OWF benefits
- 5) Documented participation in a case plan with the local child welfare agency that will stabilize the family and the adult participant has cooperated in working toward self-sufficiency
- 6) A participant who is a victim of domestic violence and is unable to obtain or maintain employment because they are participating in a program that will lead to employment within six (6) months
- 7) A participant who is unable to obtain employment because of multiple felony convictions but is pursuing a course of action that will result in employment within six months
- 8) A participant who is unemployed or under-employed and pursuing a course of training that will be completed within three (3) months or less and will result in earnings sufficient

to render the family ineligible for cash assistance had eligibility continued