

OWF TIME LIMITS AND HARDSHIP CRITERIA FOR  
MERCER COUNTY

EFFECTIVE 10-01-00

Under O.R.C. 5107.18, a County Department of Job and Family Services can declare up to twenty percent (20%) of its average caseload during the prior Federal Fiscal Year to be under a “hardship” and grant such Assistance Groups an exemption in order to continue assistance. Prior to the expiration of an Assistance Group’s thirty-six (36) months of assistance, the Eligibility Referral Specialist will review the case to assure that the time limits are correct. Then the Assistance Group will be reviewed to determine potential eligibility for a hardship exemption. Mercer County Job and Family Services, at its sole discretion, will extend benefits to not more than twenty percent (20%) of its average caseload under the circumstances described below.

The Mercer County Job and Family Services (MCJFS) has adopted the following criteria for determining whether an assistance group may qualify for a hardship exemption under O.R.C. 5107.16.

Assistance groups receiving an exemption must continue to abide by all provisions of their Self-Sufficiency Contract.

An assistance group which includes an adult who has participated in Ohio Works First (OWF) for thirty-six (36) months may be eligible for a “hardship exemption” if , upon reaching the thirty-sixth (36<sup>th</sup>) month of participation, one (1) or more of the following circumstances exists:

**GROUP A**

1. The Assistance Group’s parent or caretaker has a serious physical or mental illness/disability which renders them incapacitated for employment. The incapacity must be verified by a physician and the individual must be in the process of applying for SSI/SSD benefits or appealing the denial of such benefits. MCJFS reserves the right to secure and rely upon a second opinion from a medical provider of its choice.
2. The Assistance Group’s parent or caretaker is a victim of domestic violence who is actively seeking help from an established support provider which prevents him or her from pursuing, obtaining and/or maintaining employment.
3. The Assistance Group’s parent’s or caretaker’s presence is medically necessary to provide care for a disabled/ill immediate family member (i.e., child, spouse, parent, sibling ) living in the same household. The medical necessity of the individual’s presence to provide the care must be medically verified by a physician’s statement. MCJFS reserves the right to secure and rely upon a second opinion from a medical provider of its choice.

4. The Assistance Group who is headed by a Minor Caretaker, if that caretaker is working towards a high school diploma or GED.

### **GROUP B**

5. The Assistance Group's parent or caretaker is medically certified to be pregnant and in the third trimester of the pregnancy, or is caring for a child under the age of eight (8) weeks.
6. The Assistance Group's parent or caretaker is unable to work due to participation in an approved residential alcohol/chemical dependency rehabilitation program. Such an assistance group may receive an exemption for the duration of the rehabilitation program, up to a maximum of six months.
7. The Assistance Group's parent or caretaker, through no fault of his or her own, is unable to secure child care services, and the lack of child care prevents him/her from pursuing, obtaining and/or maintaining employment. Documentation must be received from MCJFS' child care unit that child care assistance was applied for and is unavailable. Such an Assistance Group may receive an exemption for up to six (6) months or until such time as suitable child care arrangements are found, whichever is shorter.

### **GROUP C**

8. The Assistance Group's parent or caretaker is enrolled in and has completed at least one-half of an educational or training program which is directly related to, and will prepare the individual for an employment opportunity, and the individual remains enrolled and in good standing as determined by the educational or training institution. The education or training program must, by itself or in combination with other assignments, meet the individual's work participation requirement.
9. The Assistance Group's parent or caretaker is unable to secure employment, and the unemployment rate for Mercer County, as reported by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), is continuously at a rate greater than 10% for three (3) consecutive months prior to the month in which eligibility for participation of the Assistance Group will expire.
10. The Assistance Group's parent or caretaker loses his or her employment within the last three months prior to expiration of eligibility due to a natural disaster which causes the individual's employer to close.

Assistance groups qualifying for a hardship exemption under these criteria will be evaluated every three months to determine if the hardship exemption is still applicable. ***The hardship exemption(s) shall have a maximum of twenty-four (24) months.***

The Mercer County Job and Family Services reserves the right to amend this plan at any time.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services continually monitors the percentage of the average monthly number of Ohio Works First participants in each county that are granted hardship exemptions. Once a county department's exemptions equal or exceed eighteen percent (18%), MCJFS will review all Assistance Groups receiving an exemption, to determine if any Assistance Groups no longer qualify for an exemption.

When MCJFS has reached its twenty percent limit, a committee comprised of Employment Referral Specialists and Supervisors will review all those granted an exemption in order to determine which cases remain on exemption status and which do not.

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Dale J. Borger, MSW                      Date  
Director  
Mercer County Department of  
Job and Family Services

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Jerry Laffin, Chairman                      Date  
Mercer County Board of Commissioners