

Portage County Department of Job and Family Services Ohio Works First Hardship Policy

Portage County Department of Job and Family Services (PCDJFS), in compliance with §5107.18 (E) of the Ohio Revised Code, is responsible to establish hardship criteria. This criteria must be set to allow no more than 20% (determined annually according to state criteria) of the participants from the Portage County Ohio Works First (OWF) program and who have exhausted their thirty-six (36) month lifetime assistance limits to continue to receive OWF cash assistance. The Department will automatically mail a hardship application packet one (1) month prior to their anticipated expiration of cash assistance or upon request. The application packet will include the hardship criteria policy for Portage County.

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

The department will establish an application review panel. Members will be the Public Children Services Agency (PCSA) Administrator, Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA) Administrator, Ohio Works First (OWF) Supervisor, or their designees, and a manager at the discretion of the Director. A quorum will be three (3) members. The panel will review each application to determine whether the participant's employment barriers meet a condition as specified in the hardship criteria. Such evaluation will begin as soon as the application and all requested verifications are received by PCDJFS. The review will be conducted by reviewing the application, case record, case history, and any other documentation provided. The panel may request that the assigned case manager contact the participant to obtain further documentation. No final determination will be made until the 36th month of cash assistance.

The evaluation panel will reevaluate any cases receiving a hardship exemption every three (3) months, or at the request of the assigned case manager or supervisor based on changes in the case situation or documentation received.

The following criteria will be used in priority order as listed to determine potential hardship eligibility. Once the allowable hardship slots have been reached or the criteria is changed by PCDJFS, the department reserves the right to end the hardship exemption for the criteria that is less severe as based on our priority order (see below).

1. Documented mental health conditions that make the participant unemployable as determined by the agency based on documentation as provided by a mental health professional. The granting of a hardship will only be considered if there is current compliance with any recommended treatment plan.
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 licensed child care facility.
3. Documented physical conditions that make the participant unemployable as determined by the agency based on documentation as provided by a physician

pending completion of ORSC/BVR evaluation and remediation or training necessary to determine work incapacity or retrain the care giver. If the evaluation by ORSC/BVR indicates that there is no remediation that will make employment realistic for the participant, hardship will be granted while efforts continue to pursue Social Security Disability Assistance.

4. Employed individuals with documented handicaps or conditions 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.
5. Substance abuse for which there is active treatment and a designated date to be completed. The determination that such condition renders the participant unemployable remains at the sole discretion of the department.
6. Individuals who have been receiving assistance without having to participate in the OWF program due to caring for a disabled family member in their home and are needed to continue care of the family member or individuals that are currently needed in the home for care of a disabled family member. Medical verification with approximate length of time that care is needed will be required. The disabled individual cannot be attending school full-time.
7. Individuals who have been subjected to domestic violence and the individual meets the criteria for a waiver of OWF program requirements as defined in 5101:1-3-12 and 5101:1-3-20.
8. Rare and exceptional circumstances as presented by the applicant to the committee and evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Eligibility: To be eligible to receive hardship OWF cash assistance in Portage County, the applicant must:

- File an application for a hardship exemption no later than twenty (20) days from the mailing date of the notification letter.
- Continue to comply with all requirements of PCDJFS through the self-sufficiency contract. **Failures to comply with the self-sufficiency contract established between the participant and PCDJFS will result in a permanent loss of the hardship exemption and termination of OWF cash assistance.** The hardship exemption is only available to **OWF recipients**, and once lost or removed, cannot be re-obtained.
- Must meet hardship criteria as listed above and be approved by an application review panel.

Note: The Portage County Department of Job and Family Services maintains the right to manage the exemption slots available for Portage County, and to deny or terminate an exemption as is necessary to remain within compliance with ORC §5107.18 (E).

Ineligibility: Assistance groups who are ineligible for the hardship OWF cash assistance in Portage County include:

- At least two (2) sanctions for non-compliance with the Self-Sufficiency Contract/Plan have been imposed and at least one (1) sanction has occurred within the last six (6) months.
- Individuals or assistance groups with an outstanding OWF or PRC Intentional Program Violation (IPV) overpayment balance.

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