



**Family Assistance Letter # 144B**  
**OFFICE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE**  
**June 26, 2015**

**TO:** Directors, County Departments of Job and Family Services

**FROM:** Kara B. Wentz, Deputy Director, Office of Family Assistance

**SUBJECT: Application Processing Timeliness Rates for Food Assistance - UPDATE**

Family Assistance Letter (FAL) #144 explained that the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) received an early warning notice from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) regarding the State's application timeliness (APT) rate and that as a result, ODJFS was required to establish a corrective action plan. FNS has given the State until July 31, 2015, to achieve a statewide APT rate of 90%.

As APT performance remains a top priority for ODJFS, the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) would like to update you on the progress made statewide and provide additional information about the report FNS is using to monitor our progress. In addition, OFA has identified some best practices that may be helpful to counties that are struggling to meet the monthly rate.

**Progress**

Based on the most recent report, 14 counties are at or above 95% and 34 counties are between 90%-94%. Statewide, the 30-day rate has remained above 90% for all three reporting months. The 7-day rate continues to negatively impact the overall APT rate.

**Statewide:**

	7 day rate	30-day rate	Overall rate
March	65%	92%	79%
April	66%	92%	81%
May	70%	93%	83%

It is worth noting just how close the State is to meeting the APT performance measures:

	Total # of Approvals	Total # of Timely Approvals	Missed 90% by...	Missed 95% by...
March	37,690	29,840	4,081	5,966
April	36,347	29,273	3,439	5,257
May	33,940	28,149	2,397	4,094

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Attached to this letter are two reports: one that indicates the total number of 7- and 30-day applications approved in May 2015 (see attachment 1); and another that indicates how many more applications each county agency needed to approve to reach 90% or 95% (see attachment 2).

### **Application Timeliness Report**

#### *Overriding the "041" Code*

The monthly application timeliness report includes all approvals in the reporting month and timeliness is determined as follows:

- An application approved using the "041" or "125" code is based upon the 7-day processing standard.
- An application approved using any code other than "041" or "125" is based upon the 30-day standard.

Based on a review of untimely 7-day approvals in April and May, OFA has determined that many applications coded as "expedited" and "untimely" were either not eligible for expedited service (and were actually processed timely) or were reapplications not subject to the APT processing standards. In order to ensure the proper processing standard is applied to future applications, there are two different circumstances that would warrant an override of the CRIS-E generated "041" code on AEWAA. Counties may now override the "041" code only in these two circumstances:

1. A household is approved for ongoing benefits but is determined ineligible to receive benefits for the month of application or the month following the month of application; or
2. An approval is based on an application for recertification (JFS 07204) that was received prior to the end of the certification period.

In order to override the "041" code, the appropriate county agency representative must type the new reason code of "091" over the "041" code. To complete the override, two additional codes must be entered and OFA recommends using "047" and "115".

#### *Requesting Data Adjustments*

As explained in Family Assistance Letter #144A, FNS is measuring the State's APT progress using the new application timeliness report and not Quality Control data. As with any report extracted directly from CRIS-E, the data in the report reflects administrative errors that the State would have identified as part of a Quality Control review.

Given the attention that is being given to the APT effort and the importance of the data in the application timeliness report, OFA understands that many counties are reviewing and validating data in the report. As a result (and in addition to permitting the override of the "041" code in certain circumstances), county agencies may request adjustments to their monthly APT data. When a county agency has identified an application that is incorrectly identified as being untimely in the monthly report, the county agency may submit a tracking form (see attached "APT Tracking Log") to OFA that documents how the application was processed in a timely manner. OFA will validate and track the effect of the errors and when appropriate, will provide the county agencies with an adjusted rate.

OFA will only adjust the data when the request is limited to the following reasons as supported by policy:

1. A data entry error occurred when entering the application on AEFPY.
2. A data entry error occurred when AEFPY was updated instead of utilizing the reinstatement driver.
3. The case action was to add a person to the case and not the processing of a new application.
4. The delayed processing rules were followed and documented (case was properly pended by the 30<sup>th</sup> day and approval or denial action was taken by the 60<sup>th</sup> day).
5. A sanctioned or ineligible-ABAWD assistance group entitled to expedited processing was processed within 7 days from the date the county agency discovered the assistance group had taken action(s) necessary to regain eligibility.
6. An ineligible student entitled to expedited service was processed within 7 days from the date the county agency discovered the student had taken action(s) necessary to become an eligible student.

Counties will have two weeks from the date the report becomes available in BIC to complete the tracking form and return it to OFA. Adjustments received after two weeks or incomplete tracking forms will not be processed.

#### *Missed Interviews*

OFA has received several inquiries regarding how timeliness is determined in the following circumstance:

- An application screens as expedited (or potentially expedited) and an appointment is scheduled for less than 7 days later.
- The client does not attend the appointment and a notice of missed interview is issued.
- Later in the month (after the 7<sup>th</sup> but before the 30<sup>th</sup> day), the applicant appears for an interview.
- Within 7 days of the date of the interview, the county agency determines the applicant to be eligible for SNAP.

In spite of the fact that the county agency took every required action, FNS requires the State to find the approval to be untimely. ODJFS strongly disagrees with this assessment and believes that the approval was completed timely according to the 7-day standard. While ODJFS continues to work with FNS regarding this interpretation, it cannot make an adjustment to APT data because FNS will not support it.

#### **Best Practices**

While reviewing corrective action plans submitted by county agencies, OFA has identified innovative techniques utilized by counties to modify their business processes in order to improve and maintain an acceptable APT rate. These best practices include:

- Reviewing untimely applications to determine causal factors in order to identify training or process issues.

- Tracking/monitoring of registered applications to ensure expedited applications are screened, scheduled and authorized within the appropriate expedited timeframe, and all other applications are scheduled and authorized within 30 days.
- Screening all applications for expedited service on the date the applications are received by the agency, regardless of the source (i.e., electronic or paper).
- Determining the number of additional timely applications that would have made the county reach the benchmark which provides staff with a quantifiable goal as opposed to an abstract percentage.
- Requiring all staff to read and sign Family Assistance Letters #144 and #144A, and sharing APT rates with all staff.
- Completing a mail study to determine how long it actually took for mail sent by the county agency to be received by an applicant. For example, one county agency discovered that it was over-estimating the time it took for appointment letters to be delivered and it was able to shorten scheduling times for interviews by 2-3 days.
- Making arrangements with the United States Postal Service to allow for an earlier mail pick-up time in order to allow for additional processing time. For example, one county changed their 3:00PM pick-up time to 10:00AM and realized immediate improvement in their processes.
- Immediately denying ARAD of all Medicaid-only applications with ARRC documentation of the withdrawn food assistance applications.

If you have any training or technical assistance needs, please contact Denise Olson at (419)247-0472 or at [Denise.Olson@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:Denise.Olson@jfs.ohio.gov)

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