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OFFICE OF FAMILY STABILITY LETTER #35

September 1, 2005

TO: Directors, County Departments of Job and Family Services

FROM: Jeanne Carroll, Deputy Director

SUBJECT: HURRICANE KATRINA REFUGEES

The unprecedented damage from Hurricane Katrina has made it necessary for people to be evacuated, not only from the area where they live, but even from the state. As a result of the extensive devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, many individuals in the Gulf Coast region of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi will be evacuating to other states, including Ohio. These individuals are not refugees in the normal sense of the term (i.e., immigrants to the United States), but are refugees from their state of residence. This letter will outline the available benefits that can be provided to the families and individuals who evacuate to Ohio.

Food Stamp Benefits

Refugees in states that have not been authorized to run a disaster program (such as Ohio):

When a person is evacuated, or self-evacuates, to a state that has not been authorized to run a disaster program, the state where the refugee is now living may certify the person under expedited rules. The eligibility worker in this case must:

- Treat the application as a priority;
- Verify that the refugee was living in an area affected by Hurricane Katrina when the hurricane struck (list attached); and
- Check with the refugee that he/she is not currently certified to receive food stamp benefits in that area, or any other area.

FNS will hold Ohio harmless from Quality Control errors for such certifications.

Refugees who are currently certified:

When a person who is currently certified in an area affected by Hurricane Katrina (list attached) visits a County Department of Job and Family Services (CDJFS) to ask about disaster benefits, the eligibility worker should take the following actions:

- Assure the person that he/she can use his/her current EBT card in local stores, and that he/she may continue to use food stamp benefits during his/her certification period; and

- Assist the refugee in getting a new EBT card, if his/her current card has been lost or left behind in the area affected by Hurricane Katrina.

If the refugee believes he/she will be residing in the local area permanently, or for the foreseeable future, the eligibility worker should offer to close the refugee's current case in the disaster area, and take an application for a new certification in the county to which the refugee has evacuated.

The following telephone numbers have been provided to assist Hurricane Katrina refugees:

- Alabama – to obtain information on a client's food stamp program certification status or for help in obtaining a replacement EBT card, call 1-866-465-2285.
- Mississippi – to obtain information on a client's food stamp program certification status, call 1-800-948-4060. For help in obtaining a replacement EBT card, call 1-866-449-9488.
- Louisiana - the number(s) has not been provided, but we will pass it on as soon as we receive it.

PRC Funds for Families

The CDJFS may also provide PRC benefits/services to families affected by Hurricane Katrina. It may be necessary for counties to amend their PRC plan to address residence requirements in order to serve this population. Amendments should be submitted electronically to Program-Policy@odjfs.state.oh.us.

The PRC requirements apply and they include the following:

- The assistance group must include, at a minimum, a pregnant woman or a minor child living with (except for a temporary absence) a parent, legal guardian, legal custodian, or specified relative; and
- There must be evidence of economic need (recommend 200% of the federal poverty level); and
- The assistance group must meet all other federal and state laws that are applicable to the PRC program, including, but not limited to: citizenship/qualified alien status and the requirements of ORC 5101.83 regarding receipt of fraudulent assistance if they were a former Ohio resident.

Ohio Works First and Disability Financial Assistance

In order to receive DFA or OWF benefits, an individual or family must reside in Ohio voluntarily with the intention of making his home in Ohio. Refer to rules 5101:1-5-10 and 5101:1-3-03 for policy pertaining to the residence requirement.

Additional Information

Verification - Individuals and families may not have verifications available to document eligibility requirements. For PRC, the CDJFS can accept a signed affidavit, a third-party

statement or a notarized statement. For food stamp benefits, refer to the verification procedures in rule 5101:4-2-09 for expedited and normal processing.

List of Evacuated Counties - To assist the CDJFS in identifying those individuals or families who have evacuated due to Hurricane Katrina, a list of the areas by counties and parishes is attached to this letter.

Questions - For questions regarding PRC and Food Stamp benefits, please contact Fayette Moore, Program Policy Services Section at 866-886-3537 (Option 6) or through the TANF-FSTA mailbox. For questions regarding EBT, please contact the EBT Section at 614-466-6814.

Attachment

JC:ke

c: Barbara Riley, Director
Fred Williams, Assistant Director
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List of Areas Affected by Hurricane Katrina

Alabama

Baldwin, Clarke, Choctaw, Mobile, Sumter, and Washington Counties

Louisiana

The parishes of Acadia, Ascension, Assumption, Calcasieu, Cameron, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberia, Iberville, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, Lafourche, Livingston, Orleans, Pointe Coupee, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. Helena, St. James, St. John, St. Mary, St. Martin, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Terrebonne, Vermilion, Washington, West Baton Rouge, and West Feliciana

Mississippi

Amite, Forrest, George, Greene, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Lamar, Marion, Pearl River, Perry, Pike, Stone, Walthall, and Wilkinson Counties