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Office of Family Stability Letter No. 35B  
September 13, 2005

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

**FROM:** Jeanne Carroll, Deputy Director  
Office of Family Stability

**SUBJECT: HURRICANE KATRINA REFUGEES – ENHANCED FOOD  
STAMP POLICY FOR EVACUEES**

### **Food stamp benefits**

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has issued additional policy regarding the Food Stamp Program to enable State agencies to better serve people who have evacuated Hurricane Katrina disaster areas and are applying for food stamp benefits in areas such as Ohio where the Disaster Food Stamp Program is not operating. FNS has implemented a new, one-month policy for certifying evacuees who have left Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi due to Hurricane Katrina.

This policy applies in all states, the District of Columbia, and the territories. For September 2005 **only**, the policy provides a one-month maximum food stamp benefit for any evacuee assistance group. Eligibility is based simply on evacuee status.

- **Applicability** – This policy applies to an applying assistance group that meets all four requirements:
  - The assistance group lived in a county or parish in Alabama, Louisiana, or Mississippi on August 29, 2005, and
  - The President declared the applicant's county or parish to be a disaster area, and
  - The assistance group has moved to another state. This policy does not apply to an assistance group that did not move or moved within a state.
  - The assistance group applies by October 31, 2005.
- **Allotment**
  - The assistance group will receive the maximum allotment for its assistance group size
  - The county will not prorate the allotment.
  - One monthly allotment may be issued based on these rules.

- **Assistance group size**  
The county will ask about assistance group size and use that information to calculate the allotment.  
The county will treat the assistance group as a separate assistance group.  
This is the case even if the assistance group purchases and prepares meals with others.
- **Eligibility** – There are no income or resource eligibility tests. There are no other non-financial tests.
- **Deductions** – The county will not ask about deductible expenses, because an entitled assistance group will receive the maximum allotment for its assistance group size.
- **Verifications** – The county will verify every applicant’s identity to the extent possible. The \$2,000 debit card issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency will be sufficient. For other criteria, the other documentation, collateral contacts, or the applicant’s self-declaration will be sufficient.
- **Quality Control** - These cases are not subject to quality control reviews.
- **Future assistance** – The county will apply the disaster relief evacuee policy as outlined in the Office of Family Stability (OFS) Letter #35A to continue food stamp assistance. Applicants are eligible under the policy issued under this guidance for three full months, plus the month of application.

One application will be accepted for the initial and subsequent three months. If the county has already issued food stamps for the month of September under the policy issued in OFS Letter #35A, the county can issue a supplement for the month of September to bring the benefit up to the maximum allotment for the assistance group size.

The county should ensure that recipients are provided training on the loading process for accessing EBT food stamp benefits and that this is a monthly process. Evacuees from these disaster areas that were recipients of food stamps in a county or parish of Alabama, Louisiana, or Mississippi are not familiar with the loading process required in Ohio to access EBT benefits.

### **Relaxed procedures for key-entered EBT transactions**

FNS has extended the rules governing key-entered EBT transactions through September 30, 2005. Because many food stamp recipients have been displaced without their EBT cards, they can no longer access their food stamp benefits. Though the EBT card is

normally required to be present in order to conduct a key-entered transaction—where the card number and PIN are manually entered—FNS is relaxing that requirement for displaced residents of Louisiana and Mississippi. Recipients do not need to have their card present in order to conduct a key-entered transaction for this interim period only.

If you have any questions regarding 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 concerning EBT, please contact the EBT section at 614-466-6814.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

JC:mb

cc:	Barbara Riley, Director	Family Stability staff
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