SWO REGIONAL COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES

Ohio Works First: Hardship Extension Definition and Determination Criteria

Section 5107.18 of the Ohio Revised Code limits participation in Ohio Works First (OWF) to 36 months but permits local county departments of job and family services (CDJFS) to exempt up to 20% of their OWF caseload from the time limit if it is determined that it causes a hardship for a family. Though the local CDJFS defines hardship, it is their responsibility to administer the hardship determination within the confines of the law and the state statutory construction guidelines in RC 1.42 and 1.47.

SWO County Departments of Job and Family Services define the time limit hardship as the *hard circumstances of life that result in privation, suffering or adversity due to circumstances beyond the control of the consumer.* The criteria used for this determination has been established in 3 categories: (1) Demographic, (2) Physical and Psychological and (3) Employment Related Challenges. The decision for continued assistance beyond the 36 months will be based on the unique circumstances of the individual members of the assistance group.

These criteria are specifically not an eligibility test. Meeting one or all of these criteria will not necessarily result in a hardship authorization. In cases where a hardship is provided it may be time limited and conditional. In any case, hardships are authorized to provide consumers with a limited additional period of time to achieve economic independence.

There is one universal condition that will be applied to each hardship consideration:

- It is the expectation that the parents in receipt of OWF assistance continuously seek self sufficiency through employment, continued job search, education and training, cooperation in available work experience programs and life management skills improvement. This may be measured by the individual's effort and engagement with their employment consultant/counselor, participation in their work activity and their utilization of other available support systems identified to them throughout the 36 months they received OWF assistance. Any unique circumstances at the time of the expiration of the 36 month time limit will always be considered.

Each hardship extension request will be thoroughly reviewed by the case manager, the supervisor and any other staff designated by the CDJFS. Any unique circumstances will be considered. All requests for a hardship extension are subject to the verification process in accordance with the standards of 5101:1-2-20, and, unless otherwise stated, reviewed in 6 months. Each OWF recipient/applicant will provide an explanation as to why the time limit is a hardship for their family. The counties in the SWO Region may provide a form, as a matter of convenience for the family, or verbal or written explanation from the recipient/applicant.

The following conditions are "Hardship Criteria" that will be considered in making a determination. It is not an all inclusive list. Please note: The term "parent" in the remainder of this document, may also represent a "specified relative in need" who has received 36 months of OWF benefits.

Demographic Challenges

1. The parent is a single minor head of household who has been pursuing a high school diploma or GED for a minimum of the last 6 months of their OWF receipt. An educational hardship will typically be time-limited, dependent on progress to date, continuing progress, and a clear plan for graduation and subsequent employment. ***1301***

2. The single adult parent is enrolled in a GED, post secondary education or training program which will not be completed by the expiration of their 36 month time limit. The individual must be scheduled to complete the program within no more than 12 months. An educational hardship will typically be time-limited, dependent on progress to date, continuing progress, and a clear plan for graduation and subsequent employment. (Note: This is for individuals to complete a program of study begun while in their 36 month time limit. It is not for those who have used their 36 months, to begin a new program of study.) ***0601***

3. The single parent is providing care for a disabled family member (limited to child, sibling, spouse and parent) and there are currently no other acceptable arrangements available. ***0401***

4. The single parent cares for an incapacitated child with behavioral, mental/physical challenges and appropriate child care is not available. ***0301***

5. The single parent cares for a child under the age of 6 and child care is not readily available. A child care hardship will typically be time-limited, dependent on efforts to date, continuing efforts, and an explicit willingness to use certified or licensed care. ***0302***

6. The caretaker or specified relative of a minor child is over the age of 55 and is unable to obtain employment. As with all Hardship requests, this criteria is dependent on the consumer's unique circumstances, and is not a general absolution from OWF lifetime limits. ***0102***

7. The single parent is not self sufficient due to a recent divorce or legal separation (within the past 3 months). The individual needs time to address barriers to employment as they were supported by their spouse. ***0501***

Physical or Psychological Challenges

8. The single parent/caretaker is a victim of domestic. ***0502***

9. The parent has provided extensive, detailed documentation from a licensed physician to confirm a significant physical, mental or emotional incapacitation/disability. If there is evidence that an individual may be eligible for Social Security Disability, they will be required to apply. ***0403***

10. The family has experienced a catastrophic event, such as an unexpected physical impairment (injury or car accident), death of a spouse or child, homelessness, or any other unique circumstance that ends or postpones gainful employment; the family is in need of OWF assistance until stability can be re-established. County staff is responsible for determining an appropriate timeframe for each circumstance regarding if a hardship should be granted, and for how long. ***0503***

11. The parent is a resident of an ODADAS approved substance abuse treatment facility. The hardship extension will be reviewed 3 months after the individual has successfully completed the program, or at the next reapplication, whichever is sooner. ***1201***

Employment Related Challenges

12. The geographic area is experiencing a high unemployment rate as determined by the ODJFS, Bureau of Employment Services. ***1501***
13. The geographic area is experiencing a labor surplus as determined by ODJFS, Bureau of Employment Services. ***1502***
14. The parent has significant, yet temporary, challenges to employment (child care, transportation, recent release from incarceration, etc.). ***0901***

These three criteria may be relevant to any one case. They would rarely merit a hardship approval in the absence of one or several other contributing considerations.

(The 4 digits at the end of each listed criteria is the CRISE code for that specific hardship. They are listed on TLRI.)