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OFFICE OF FAMILY STABILITY LETTER # 54
July 25, 2006

TO: Directors, County Departments of Job and Family Services

FROM: Jeanne Carroll, Deputy Director
Office of Family Stability

SUBJECT: Employment Retention Incentive (ERI) Program

This letter is to introduce the Employment Retention Incentive (ERI) Program. On August 1, 2006, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) will launch the Employment Retention Incentive (ERI) Program. In Am.Sub. H.B. 66, of the 125th General Assembly, temporary law permitted ODJFS to implement this program in State Fiscal Year 2007. The ERI program is a Title IV-A funded cash incentive program for individuals leaving cash assistance that has the purpose of promoting job retention and eliminating OWF dependency. The cash incentives are excluded from the federal definition of assistance in 45 C.F.R. 260.31(A).

We would like to recognize and thank the county departments of job and family services for the considerable support and assistance provided to us as we developed the ERI program. Throughout the process, Scioto and Greene counties were particularly informative and crucial in their advisory capacity. They provided their unique ERI program information, applications, notices and ERI data that formed the foundation of a flexible and comprehensive ERI program that will be supported in the automated CRIS-E system. We presented proposals to the CRIS-E County Liaison Committee on numerous occasions and received helpful feedback. In March 2006, we posted draft rule 5101:1-23-80 to the ODJFS Clearance site for review and comment and we received a number of helpful responses. In April 2006, we presented an overview of the ERI Program for county staff at 5 statewide locations - Greene, Summit, Muskingum, Hancock and Franklin Counties. We received many good suggestions as a result of the clearance process and during the training sessions and have incorporated some of those changes in the final rule.

The new rule for the ERI program can be found in the Cash Assistance Manual and can be found online at the ODJFS eManuals web site.

Eligibility for the ERI Program

Each eligible individual in a former OWF assistance group may be able to receive their own ERI payment provided the following requirements are met:

- The ERI applicant must have been in receipt of OWF and the OWF case is closed on or after July 31, 2006;
- At least one OWF recipient in the last month of OWF eligibility had countable employment income in the month that OWF was terminated;
- An application (JFS 07204) must be completed and returned to the CDJFS prior to or no later than the second month following the termination of the OWF case.
- At the time of application, the ERI applicant is employed an average of at least 25 hours per week or earning at least the equivalent gross wages of federal minimum wage times 25 hours per week.

Applicants who are determined eligible for the ERI program could receive up to \$1000 within a nine month period. The first ERI payment will be \$200, issued upon approval. Subsequent payments are as follows:

- 3rd month \$200 if employment is confirmed in the 2nd month;
- 6th month \$200 if employment is confirmed in the 5th month;
- 9th month \$400 if employment is confirmed in the 8th month.

An individual can receive ERI payments once within a three year period. Verification of employment may be required, although CRIS-E has been programmed to notify the worker if employment exists on the AEIEI or AEISE screens if an individual is in receipt of Food Stamps and medical benefits.

Application

A new ERI application, JFS 07204, "Application for Employment Retention Incentive (ERI)" (07/2006) has been designed to be used by individuals applying for the ERI program. It consists of an informational coversheet and a one-page application that is completed by the ERI applicant. A copy of the application is attached to this letter.

The JFS 07204 will be stocked at the ODJFS warehouse. An initial supply will be sent to each CDJFS and additional applications must be re-ordered through the normal channels. The application will also be available online at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/ofam/cmandfsa.stm> and also on the ODJFS Forms Central page at <http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/inner.asp>. Spanish and Somali versions of the application will be available at a later date at which time a CAMTL will be issued. The Spanish and Somali versions will only be available online; copies will not be maintained at the ODJFS warehouse.

ERI Brochure

An informational brochure about the ERI program, JFS 07206 “Employment Retention Incentive Program” (07/2006) will be available for use by the CDJFS. This brochure can be used to inform OWF applicants and/or recipients about the ERI program. A copy of the brochure is attached to this letter.

The JFS 07206 will be stocked at the ODJFS warehouse. An initial supply will be sent to each CDJFS and to advocate groups; additional brochures must be re-ordered through the normal channels. The brochure will also be available on the ODJFS Forms Central page at <http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/inner.asp>. Spanish and Somali versions of the brochure will be available at a later date at which time a CAMTL will be issued. The Spanish and Somali versions will only be available online; copies will not be maintained at the ODJFS warehouse.

CRIS-E

Various Ohio Works First notices have been revised to include information about the ERI program.

New screens (AEOER, IQER and IQED) have been developed in CRIS-E. ERI approval and denial notices have been created and will be generated out of CRIS-E. Full details on CRIS-E processing will be addressed in a View Flash Bulletin later this month.

We welcome your comments as you begin implementation of the ERI Program. If you have any questions or comments regarding the ERI Program, please contact the ODJFS Program Policy Services Unit TANF-FSTA mailbox.

Attachments

JC:mkk

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