



Department of Human Resources
311 West Saratoga Street
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Family Investment Administration
ACTION TRANSMITTAL

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**TO: DIRECTORS, LOCAL DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES
DEPUTY/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS FOR FAMILY INVESTMENT
FAMILY INVESTMENT SUPERVISORS AND ELIGIBILITY STAFF**

FROM: KEVIN M. MCGUIRE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RE: WELFARE AVOIDANCE GRANTS (WAGS)

PROGRAM AFFECTED: TEMPORARY CASH ASSISTANCE (TCA)

ORIGINATING OFFICE: OFFICE OF POLICY, RESEARCH AND SYSTEMS

SUMMARY

Recently we received several questions about Welfare Avoidance Grants. As a result, we have updated WAG policy and strengthened accountability.

The purpose of a WAG is to meet an immediate and compelling need in order to prevent a family with children (TCA applicants or recipients) from going on welfare or to get them off welfare (Temporary Cash Assistance). The family's situation must be such that without the WAG money the family would have to begin receiving or continue receiving TCA.

A WAG is not an entitlement and it is not Emergency Assistance to Families with Children (EAFC). Do not use WAGs and EAFCs interchangeably. A family cannot apply for a WAG. A WAG is a non-recurrent, short-term cash benefit paid to avoid ongoing cash assistance.

This action transmittal reviews the policy and strengthens accountability for issuing WAGs to eligible families and provides guidance to case managers in assessing the use of a WAG. To strengthen accountability the local department director or the director's designee must approve each WAG before issuance. Used appropriately, a WAG should help the family become self-sufficient and stay off TCA.

WAG POLICY

Local flexibility exists in determining individual local department WAG policy and what situations WAGs will cover. However, WAG policy must follow specific requirements as described in Chapter II, Section 1 of the TCA manual.

ASSESSMENT

The case manager should recognize the technical and financial eligibility factors for a WAG and be able to determine whether a TCA applicant or recipient is a candidate for a WAG. The assistance unit must meet technical eligibility, which is the same as for TCA. In some instances, a candidate for a WAG may be financially ineligible for TCA. One of the purposes of the WAG is to keep people employed.

The case manager must first complete an assessment with the TCA applicant or recipient. As part of the assessment of a TCA applicant or reassessment of a TCA recipient, the case manager may offer a WAG to the customer if the case manager finds that there is a *compelling* need that prevents the applicant or recipient from becoming independent. The applicant or recipient must not have the resources to meet the need and must have exhausted all possibilities for meeting the need. A compelling need means a need that if met would allow the family to be self-sufficient but if not met would cause the family to go on welfare or remain on welfare.

Use the attached list of assessment questions to assist in developing the family's Independence Plan and decide whether a WAG would be beneficial to them.

INDEPENDENCE PLAN

After assessing the customer's need, the case manager and the TCA applicant or recipient create an Independence Plan. The plan details the customer's goals and how the customer is going to achieve the goals. The plan states what the customer's responsibilities are and what the agency's are. While completing the Independence Plan the case manager should discuss WAGS with the customer, if appropriate.

WAG AGREEMENT and RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The customer and the case manager decide together that a WAG is appropriate. They both must sign the WAG agreement. The WAG agreement is mandatory.
2. The agreement must clearly state:
 - The need the WAG will cover;
 - The amount of the WAG;
 - The time period the WAG will cover; and
 - That the family is ineligible for TCA during the period the WAG covers.
3. After the customer and case manager sign the WAG agreement they **both** must sign the Rights and Responsibilities statement that everything on the agreement is correct and accurate under penalty of perjury. The case manager explains that the customer may not receive TCA during the period of time covered by the WAG.

Several local departments have requested that DHR create a WAG Agreement Form that they may use. We are in the process of doing that and it will be available shortly. There is no requirement for local departments to use the DHR form. You may continue to use the WAG Agreement form created in the local department, if it meets the requirements listed in paragraph 2 of this section.

WAG GRANT AMOUNTS

The maximum WAG amount is three times the maximum TCA grant for the assistance unit size unless:

1. There is compelling need, and
2. The WAG amount does not exceed 12 times the maximum TCA grant amount for the assistance unit size.

A family may receive more than one WAG if another instance of immediate and limited need occurs. However, a second WAG may not be issued until the period covered by a prior WAG expires.

An assistance unit may not receive TCA in any month covered by the WAG.

The amount of a WAG that covers any portion of a month counts as a full month of assistance.

WAG customers should be encouraged to apply for food stamps and medical assistance if they are not already receiving benefits. However, they are not required to apply for other benefits or file for child support or assign child support received to the State.

EXAMPLES:

The following are examples of what to review to determine WAG eligibility. Case managers are encouraged to be creative, within the scope of the regulations and their local department WAG plan, in assisting customers to resolve issues that may cause them to apply for assistance.

1. Mary Smith has never received public assistance for herself or her two small children. She has always worked and received child support. She and her children's father work for the same company. Both were laid off because the company is moving out of the area. Mary took the bus to work every day, but now there is no bus service where the company is moving. Mary is applying for TCA because she can't pay her rent or provide for her children. Mary tells the case manager that she has a car that needs new tires, a battery and a few other things but she hasn't been able to afford to get it fixed. It is unreliable to drive to work everyday. Mary said it would cost about \$650 to fix it. Mary is a good employee and will be rehired if she can get to the new location.

Mary is a good candidate for a WAG. Her situation will be resolved if she can keep her job, which means getting her car fixed. A WAG will cover the expenses and prevent Mary from coming on the TCA roles.

2. Sue is employed full-time and has one child, age 9, for whom she receives child support of \$250 per month. Sue is behind in her car payments, and the company is going to repossess the car. She received a WAG 11 months ago when she got behind and the company threatened to repossess the car. Sue is requesting assistance again. Sue's payments are \$350 per month and she owes 3 months.

The case manager needs to review this situation very carefully before offering a WAG. In order to offer a WAG for the same type of immediate need met by a previous WAG the LDSS must determine that the current immediate need represents a new and verified compelling need. Unless the following questions can be answered satisfactorily, Sue is not eligible. She received a WAG previously for the same thing.

- How would Sue's job be affected if she lost the car?
- Why is Sue behind in car payments?
- Did she seek other resources to make the payments?
- Is this a situation that can not be resolved, because in a few months Sue will be behind again?
- Can Sue afford the payments each month?
- Does she make an attempt to pay them?
- What about other expenses? Can she pay them and the car? Does she pay her other expenses?
- Would Sue need to apply for TCA if she lost her job.

3. John has received TCA for himself and his son for 6 months because he lost his job. His son was sick and John had stayed home with him for several days. When John went back to work his boss fired him. John was disqualified for unemployment because he was fired. He has now found a new job that will support him and the children. He will not get paid for 4 weeks after the job starts but in order to start, he must buy tools, work clothes, and a bus pass. He verifies the expenses to be \$1200.

After submitting verification requested by the case manager, as defined in the local plan, John is a candidate for a WAG. John will have a job that will make him and his child independent of TCA.

- The amount John needs exceeds three times the maximum grant amount for an assistance unit of two but there is immediate and compelling need.

NARRATION

The questions and the assessment completed earlier should be the basis for the narration. All case activity must have clear, thorough narration explaining what is going on, what was done, and why. WAG narration is no exception. Treat the narration as if you are explaining to someone who knows nothing about the program what you did and why. Narration protects the case manager by showing the case manager followed policy and procedure in issuing or not issuing a benefit.

REVIEW OF WAG CASES

FIA will regularly monitor a sample of WAG benefits issued in each local department. In order to ensure case records containing WAG information are available in the local department, please follow the retention schedule for TCA files.

ACTION DUE

WAG procedures as written in this AT are effective upon receipt. The local department director or the director's designee must approve each WAG before issuance. The case must be complete including narration prior to the Director's signature and before the WAG is issued.

INQUIRIES

Please refer TCA and WAG questions to Marilyn Lorenzo at 410-767-7333 or Gretchen Simpson at 410-767-7937.

cc: DHR Executive Staff
FIA Management Staff
DHR Help Desk
Constituent Services

Assessment Questions for Determining Eligibility for A WAG

Use these questions as a guide to obtain the information needed to determine the need for a Welfare Avoidance Grant (WAG).

1. Why is the customer applying for or receiving TCA?
2. Who is in the house?
3. How did the family manage in the past?
4. How much income does the family have and what is the source?
5. What caused a change in the day-to-day situation that the customer must now apply for TCA? or
6. Why hasn't there been a change in the day-to-day situation with the TCA recipient that would enable the family to get off of TCA?
7. Does the customer have a job? Noting a customer's job potential on his/her statement that he/she can get a job anywhere is not enough. If a job is available why didn't the individual take it?
8. What are the customer's education level, job skills and readiness for obtaining and keeping a job?
9. What is the immediate and compelling need the customer has?
 - ◆ An eviction may make the customer's life difficult, but the customer is not likely to lose a job because of being evicted. Explore resources the customer may have.
 - ◆ The customer's car broke down but the customer lives on a bus line. It may be inconvenient to use the bus but the customer can still get to work.
10. Is the immediate and compelling need a covered situation in the local department's WAG Plan?
11. Would a WAG help a recipient leave TCA for independence, or just get the family off TCA for a few months?
 - ◆ What support systems does the customer have in place as the family moves to self-sufficiency?