



Department of Human Resources
311 West Saratoga Street
Baltimore MD 21201

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: ALLOWING A TELEPHONE ALLOWANCE FOR A NON-LAND LINE

PROGRAM AFFECTED: FOOD SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM

ORIGINATING OFFICE: OFFICE OF PROGRAMS

SUMMARY

For over thirty years, the Food Supplement Program (FSP) has deducted the cost of telephones in determining a household's eligibility and benefit amounts, either by deducting actual telephone bills or standard telephone allowances. During this time, communications technology has expanded and FSP customers have gone beyond using traditional land-lines and are using new devices and services, like cellular telephones, pre-paid telephone cards, and Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP - or internet phone service). The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) recently provided guidance about allowing the telephone allowance for non-land-line expenses.

ACTION REQUIRED

To determine if a household is entitled to a telephone allowance, local departments must consider the cost of telephone service that is associated with a specific device. This includes traditional land-line service, cellular service, and VoIP.

For cellular telephone service, allow the telephone allowance when the household pays a monthly fee or buys a pre-paid card with a certain dollar value or number of minutes.

Do not allow the telephone allowance for the cost of pay phones and of phone cards that are not associated with a specific device. FNS does not consider the intermittent use of pay phones to be equivalent to maintaining a telephone.

Reminder: Households that are entitled to the Standard Utility Allowance or Limited Utility Allowance do not receive a telephone allowance.

Following is a chart to summarize the policy:

Telephone Expense		Is the household entitled to the telephone standard?
Traditional land-line service		Yes
Cellular phone service	Periodic plan (like monthly or annual)	Yes
	Per-minute or per-call service	Yes
Voice over Internet Protocol		Yes
Pre-paid phone cards that do not accompany a specific device		No
Pay Phones		No
Other service	Using a specific device	Yes
	Not using a specific device	No

Verification of entitlement to the telephone standard is not required, unless questionable, except when a local department has chosen optional verification that requires all households to verify that they actually incur a utility expense. See Types of Optional Verification, Section 408.62 in the FSP Manual.

INQUIRIES:

Please direct FSP policy questions to Rick McClendon at 410-767-7307.

cc: FIA Management Staff
 Constituent Services
 DHR Help Desk