



Department of Human Resources  
311 West Saratoga Street  
Baltimore MD 21201

Family Investment Administration  
**ACTION TRANSMITTAL**

Control Number: #03-27

Effective Date: Immediately

Issuance Date: November 22, 2002

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

**FROM: CHARLES E. HENRY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**RE: FOOD STAMP PROGRAM ACCESS**

**PROGRAM AFFECTED: FOOD STAMPS (FS)**

**ORIGINATING OFFICE: OFFICE OF POLICY, RESEARCH AND SYSTEMS**

**SUMMARY:**

The State's current budget deficit and hiring freeze has caused many local departments of social services to find more efficient ways to provide essential services to their customers. Despite our current or future resource constraints we must maintain quality customer service. Quality customer service must remain a high priority for all our programs.

Our FS customer profiles are changing. The caseload now includes more hard working families than ever before. We must also continue to serve the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities. All customers must be able to easily access our programs.

The Food Stamp Program (FSP) requires good customer service practices. To assist local departments in ensuring that customers receive appropriate and consistent information we have included, in a question and answer format, suggested answers to frequently asked questions. FS policy requirements are also included.

All local department staff must be aware of the correct information to provide to customer questions regarding FS.

**ACTION REQUIRED:**

Local departments must ensure that all staff that have customer contact are aware of the following requirements:

- ◆ Customers can mail in, fax, drop off or have someone drop off an application at any time during the hours of operation.

- ◆ The local department must accept applications every day during business hours regardless of whether an interview is held.
- ◆ Local departments **must provide a scheduled appointment** to any customer who is not interviewed on the day the local department receives his application.
- ◆ Local departments must mail an application to any customer on the day the application is requested.
- ◆ The local department must **screen** every customer's application for expedited FS service and take appropriate action. No face to face interview is required for expedited FS services.
- ◆ A food stamp face to face interview is required only once in 12 months for households who are not certified longer than 12 months.
- ◆ Local departments can **and should** waive the FS face to face when it creates a hardship for the customer. Complete a phone interview and document in the case file why a face to face was not completed.

Examples:

- An employed person may not be able to come to the office during normal hours because of the job and the agency does not have evening hours.
- Elderly persons or a persons with disabilities may not be able to travel because of their physical condition or because they depend on someone who works.
- An elderly person or a person with a disability may not be able to travel because of the weather (heat can be just as bad as ice or snow or heavy rain).

## **CHARTS:**

The two charts below give answers to frequently asked questions about applying for Food Stamps. The first chart lists questions and suggested responses along with the policy that supports the responses. The last page of this transmittal is a handy one-page chart to tear out and keep under your telephone for quick reference.

**SUGGESTED RESPONSES TO CUSTOMER INQUIRIES ABOUT FS  
WITH POLICY BACKUP**

<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>POLICY</b>
<b>What do I need to do to get food stamps ?</b>	The first thing you need to do is fill out an application and submit it to the department of social services in the area where you live. What is your address?	The application process begins with a request for an application and ends with notification of the household's eligibility or ineligibility. An interview is not required to file an application and an incomplete application may be filed as long as it has the applicant's name and address and is signed by a responsible household member or the authorized representative.
<b>What time can I come in today to apply?</b>	Our office is open until 4:30 today (whatever time is normal business hours). You can bring in your application, fax it or have someone drop it off for you during those hours. If we can't see you today we will schedule an appointment for you. We will screen your application right away to see if you are eligible for emergency FS. You need to get an application in as soon as possible.	Households have the right to file an application for FS on the same day they contact the local department. Households are to be encouraged to file their application the same day the household or the representative contacts the local department.
<b>How long will I be in the office?</b>	The average wait time in our office is _____. It actually depends on the number of people who are being seen. You should be prepared for a wait in case we are very busy. Make sure you have extra diapers or bottles if you have a baby or snacks for older children. Make sure you have someone to pick your child up at school in case you are here longer. The actual application interview takes about an hour.	There is no policy requirement for length of time in the office. However, for good customer service local departments must make sure that customers are seen as soon as possible and not left waiting in the reception room.
<b>If I can't get to the office, can I call again and get the application by mail?</b>	Yes, we will mail you an application on the same day you ask for one. Do you want me to send you one now? What is your name and address?	The local department must mail an application the same day the customer requests one.

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<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>POLICY</b>
<b>Could I fax the application back?</b>	<p>Yes, you can. Our fax number is _____. Please mark your application to _____'s* attention. She/he will make sure it gets to the correct person. You could call (<u>same</u> name) at _____ to make sure we received your application and what case manager it is assigned to.</p> <p>* At LDSS discretion, give customers a name of a person or name of a unit to contact.</p>	<p>FS applicants can file an application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In person</li> <li>▪ By mail,</li> <li>▪ By dropping it off, or</li> <li>▪ Having someone else drop an application off for the household,</li> <li>▪ By FAX or other electronic means.</li> </ul>
<b>How long does it take to get FS?</b>	<p>We will review your application the day it is filed to determine if you are eligible for expedited FS. If you are we will issue them to you within 7 days. You will need an Independence Card to be able to access your FS benefits if you are eligible, so we will schedule you to get a card when you are here.</p> <p>If you are not eligible for expedited FS right away we will process your application as soon as possible but usually no later than 30 days after you file your application.</p>	<p>Customers eligible for expedited services must have the opportunity to participate in the FSP as soon as possible but no later than seven days following the date of application. The seven days includes notice to the customer of eligibility, issuing and training on the use of an EBT card.</p> <p>Local departments must act promptly on all applications. Customers must have the opportunity to participate in the FSP as soon as possible but no later than 30 calendar days following the date the application was filed. The 30 days includes the customer being notified of eligibility, trained on the use of an EBT card and issued a card.</p>

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<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>POLICY</b>
<p><b>What do I need to bring with me?</b></p>	<p>Having the information available when you submit your application speeds up the process. You should have identification for the head of household and representative, if there is a representative, social security numbers for everyone in the household, proof of all income in the household, proof of all bank accounts such as checking and savings and CDs. If anyone is paying court ordered child support, proof of the court order and proof the child support is paid. If anything else is needed the case manager will tell you.</p>	<p>FS applicants need to verify only their identity for expedited FS. Identity can be verified by collateral contact. However LDSS should make every effort to verify residency and income within the seven days expedited time- frame.</p> <p>For normal eligibility considerations the LDSS must verify the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identity- (the head of the household and where applicable the authorized representative), driver's license, library card, work or school ID, wage stub, and voters registration card are examples.</li> <li>▪ Residency- lease rent or mortgages payment receipts, utility bills or collateral contact.</li> <li>▪ Social security numbers-customers do not have to have a social security card but must have a number for everyone in the FS household.</li> <li>▪ Immigrant eligibility status.</li> <li>▪ Gross non-exempt income- pay stubs, employer, statement, and award letter.</li> <li>▪ Resources- FS – For all but categorically eligible households.</li> <li>▪ Utility expenses- in excess of the State standard if the household wants to claim actual expenses.</li> <li>▪ Disability- if the household requests an exemption from work registration or student status. Customers receiving Federal disability benefits are considered disabled without further verification.</li> <li>▪ Household composition if separate household status is questionable.</li> <li>▪ Legal obligation to pay child support and the amount paid.</li> </ul>

**SUGGESTED RESPONSES TO CUSTOMER INQUIRIES ABOUT FS  
WITH POLICY BACKUP**

QUESTION	RESPONSE	POLICY
<p><b>I work from 7:30-4:30 and can't come in during the hours you are open. How can I get benefits?</b></p>	<p>The first thing you need to do is fill out an application and submit it. We have evening hours on _____ (if your local department has evening hours). Would you like to come in _____?</p> <p>You can get an application at the office, on line at the DHR website or we can mail you one. You should try to get your application in as soon as possible because, if you are eligible, the date you file your application can affect the amount of food stamps you will receive in the first month. You can mail one in, fax it, or you or someone can drop an application off.</p> <p>If you can't come in because you work we will complete an interview by phone or some other way.</p>	<p>Local departments must establish procedures that best meet the needs of special households including households with earned income (working households).</p>

**MONITORING**

DHR through the Bureau of Continuous Improvement (BCI), will monitor the effectiveness of LDSS customer service through periodic random phone calls to staff in the local departments.

**INQUIRIES**

For FS policy questions please contact Marilyn Lorenzo at 410-767-7333 or Kay Finegan at 410-767-7939.

cc: FIA Management Staff  
 Constituent Services  
 DHR Help Desk  
 RESI

## SUGGESTED RESPONSES TO CUSTOMER INQUIRIES ABOUT FOOD STAMPS

QUESTION	RESPONSE
<b>What do I need to do to get food stamps?</b>	The first thing you need to do is fill out an application and submit it to the department of social services in the area where you live. What is your address?
<b>What time can I come in to apply?</b>	Our office is open until 4:30 today (whatever time is normal business hours). You can bring in your application, fax it or have someone drop it off for you during those hours. If we can't see you today we will schedule an appointment for you. We will screen your application right away to see if you are eligible for emergency food stamps. You need to get an application in as soon as possible.
<b>How long will I be in the office?</b>	The average wait time in our office is _____. It actually depends on the number of people who are being seen. You should be prepared for a wait in case we are very busy. Make sure you have extra diapers or bottles if you have a little baby or snacks for older children. Make sure you have someone to pick your child up at school in case you are here longer. The actual application interview takes about an hour.
<b>How long does it take to get food stamps ?</b>	We will review your application the day it is filed to determine if you are eligible for expedited food stamps. If you are, we will issue them to you within 7 days. You will need an Independence Card to be able to access your food stamp benefits if you are eligible, so we will schedule you to get a card when you are here. If you are not eligible for food stamps right away we will process your application as soon as possible but usually no later than 30 days after you file your application.
<b>What do I need to bring with me?</b>	Having the information available when you submit your application speeds up the process. You should have identification for the head of household and representative, if there is a representative, social security numbers for everyone in the household, proof of all income in the household, proof of all bank accounts such as checking and savings and CDs. If anyone is paying court ordered child support, proof of the court order and proof the child support is paid. If anything else is needed the case manager will tell you.
<b>If I can't get to the office, can I call and get an application by mail?</b>	Yes, we will mail you an application on the same day you request one. Do you want me to send you one now? If the answer is yes - What is your address?
<b>Could I fax the application back?</b>	Yes, you can. Our fax number is _____. Please mark your application to _____'s attention. She/he or the unit will make sure it gets to the correct person. You could call ( <u>same</u> name) at _____ to make sure we received your application and find out who it is assigned to.
<b>I work from 7:30-4:30 and can't come in during the hours you are open. How can I get benefits?</b>	The first thing you need to do is fill out an application and submit it. You can get an application at the office, on line at the DHR web-site or we can mail you one. We have evening hours on _____ (if your local department has evening hours). Would you like to come in _____? You should try to get your application in as soon as possible because, if you are eligible, the date you file your application can affect the amount of food stamps you will receive in the first month. You can mail one in, fax it, or you or someone else can drop an application off. Be sure to tell us if you can't come in because you work, or for some other reason, we may be able to complete the interview by phone or some other way.