

### What Adjustment(s) is the State Requesting?

- Extend Certification Periods and Waive Periodic Reports – COV-130
- Waive Initial and Recertification Interviews- COV-084
- Postpone Expedited Service Interviews

### Demonstrated Need for Extension of the Adjustment

Alaska appreciates that FNS is looking to “return to normal” as quickly as possible. Alaska does not wish to maintain operations outside of established rules longer than is needed, but we strongly believe there is still a need for these waivers in Alaska. We believe extending these waivers for July is appropriate based on the fact that:

- Alaska remains under an active emergency declaration
- Alaska public assistance offices are still not open to the public – we believe the waivers allow for greater access to benefits while the public cannot visit our offices in person
- Our unemployment rate jumped from 5.2% in March to 12.9% in April. Families are out of work and in need of continued support. Access to benefits through an extended certification period for July allows those families access. If the family is eligible for pandemic unemployment benefits they would be required to report the change so limits the risk of incorrect benefits being issued
- USDA continues offering Emergency Allotment options for States, which further supports there is a need for benefits to families. Extending the certification period without a periodic review also supports the access to benefits during an active pandemic
- Our applications have increased when taking into account those cases that were extended and not having to be processed. Extending the certification period for July continues to allow us to maintain timeliness. Those numbers are included below
- Alaska continues to require social distancing/quarantine measures. Extending the certification period allows individuals to not face pressure to enter the community to drop off recertification forms and supporting documentation as they likely do not have the resources available to do so from home. Entering the community also requires out of pocket expenses that further stretches budgets during the economic downturn as a result of the pandemic
- As our offices are closed to the public and the large majority of our staff are working from home, these waivers continue to support efficient processing of cases and promoting access to the program

	Initial Applications		Recertification Extended	Initial App w/Recert Ext	
	2020	2019	2020	2020	2019
Mar	3,917	3,856	3,579	7,496	+3,640
Apr	3,937	3,957	4,689	8,626	+4,669
May	1,993	4,051	5,092	7,085	+3,034

### How Does the State Plan to Transition to the New Normal?

Alaska has a plan to transition back to normal processing when those cases that were extended become due for renewal. With our new business process redesign we have the ability to predict the amount of work coming do and adjust resources to meet that need. Alaska will:

- Identify the cases coming due to recertification beginning in September (the first month that cases were extended)
- Mail recertification notices and forms in August
- Increase resources available to work recertification’s as they are received
- We expect the workload will be manageable based on current processing timelines.
- We have also worked Medicaid cases that have pushed out those certification periods. This will require less of these cases to be worked in the short term, allowing for more resources to work the SNAP recertification.
- Alaska also continues to pursue an online application. While that may not be in place by September, once in place it will allow for the work to come in via a different channel for additional efficiencies in processing and

receiving the information earlier to spread out the work throughout the month prior to an eligibility decision being made.

**Regional Recommendation:**

WRO does not believe FNS should extend the aforementioned COVID waivers. The state has not provided enough data to warrant continuing the waivers. For example:

- Application numbers have returned to pre-COVID numbers
- The State does not indicate there is a backlog of applications
- The State does not mention system limitations
- Offices remain closed, but FNS has approved waivers to eliminate face-to-face interviews and accept telephonic signatures
- The State does not mention any staffing limitations