

DAVID Y. IGE  
GOVERNOR



PANKAJ BHANOT  
DIRECTOR

CATHY BETTS  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
Benefit, Employment & Support Services Division  
1010 Richards Street, Suite 412  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

June 8, 2020

Ms. Jackie Bourne  
Senior Program Specialist  
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service  
90 Seventh Street, Suite 10-100  
San Francisco, CA 94103

Re: Operational Status of Benefit, Employment & Support Services Division  
Justification for Waiver Requests

Jackie:

I provide the following operational status as the foundation for requesting a continuation of the following waivers:

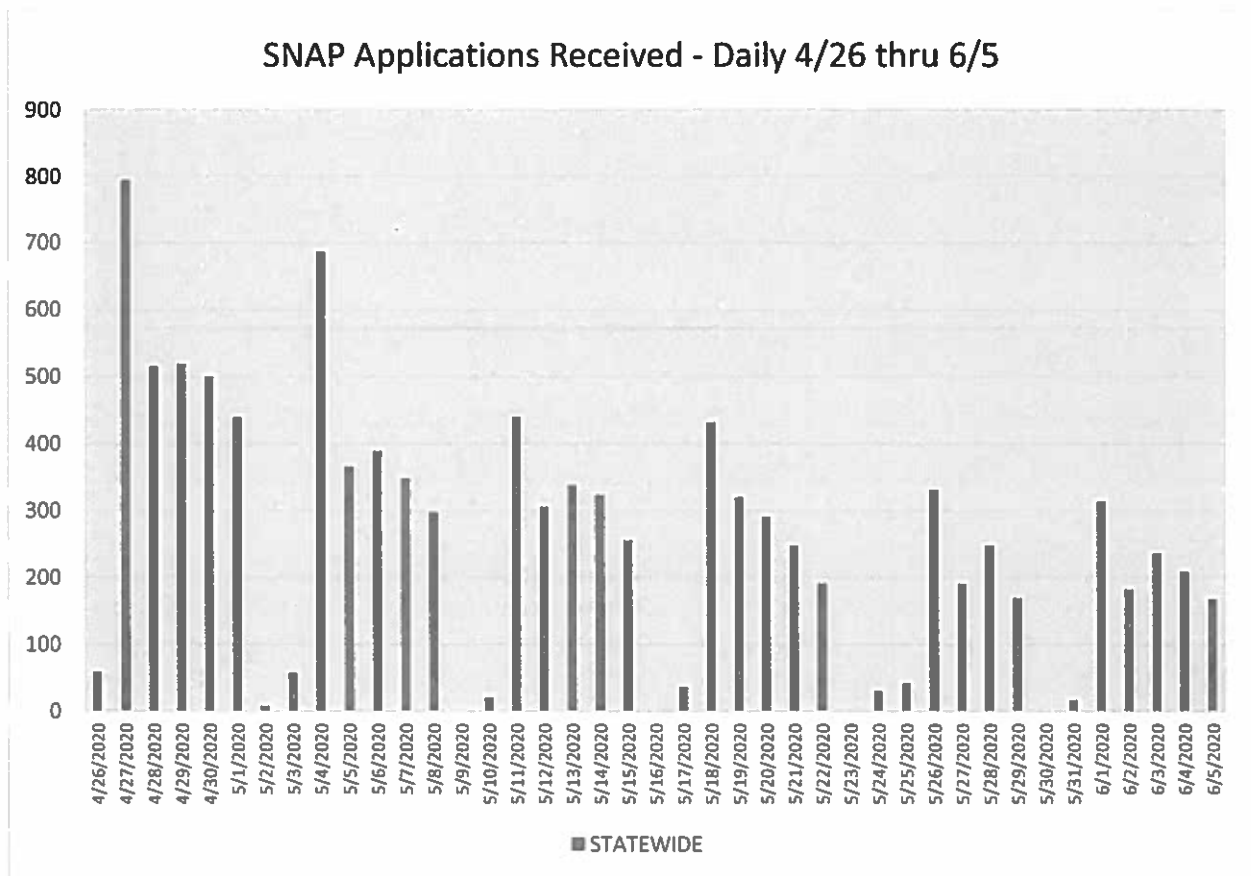
- A. Tier 1  
Telephonic Signature, COV-051;
- B. Tier 2  
Waive Fair Hearing Timeframes, Blanket Waiver Approval;
- C. Tier 3  
Initial Interview, COV-128  
Postpone Expedited Service Interview, Blanket Waiver Approval;  
Eliminate Face to Face Interview, Blanket Waiver Approval; COV-157  
QC Face to Face Interview, Blanket Waiver Approval. COV-1109

**SNAP Application Volumes**

Recent monthly SNAP applications received by BESSD are as follows:

January: 5426  
February: 4412  
March: 7106  
April: 13,370  
May: 6821

As reported to FNS weekly, we currently see a more even trend in initial applications, numbering ~1100 per week, which was consistent with pre-Covid volumes. For a visual representation, please see the following chart:



Brian Donohoe, Administrator

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While the current trend is sharply down, our operational challenges in our offices due to Pandemic will not change for several months.

#### Operational challenges due to COVID-19

Lobbies in BESSD Processing centers are small. Typically, applicants and recipients are required to stand and sit very close to each other in the lobby waiting area where seating areas do exist; in most offices, clients wait outside in the surrounding site furniture. Hawaii has historically been a state relying on face to face contact with clients; in the past, 50% to 60% of all client interaction has been face to face. At the same time, BESSD answered 50 to 100 live calls each day. Now, we see live call answer daily averages in the 500 to 700 range daily.

For those clients who do not have a phone, or do not have access to a phone, we must have a safe lobby approach for the clients and staff. Much of our time requirement for postponing interviews is due to this category of recipient. As we will be unable to bring the lobby client past the reception desk in the processing centers, BESSD is obliged to conduct interviews in the lobbies, with proper social distancing and protective shields and "droplet" barriers. We are in the process of submitting a plan to Governor Ige detailing the plexiglass installation requirements and the process changes needed to execute safe and private interviews with phone-less applicants. After approval, this construction will take several months to complete.

While we have experienced successes in re-defining our operations with the necessary closures of lobbies, BESSD remains in a growth mode to fully implement telework strategies. BESSD has implemented both VDI and VPN strategies for telework, allowing eligibility staff to access all systems, files and programs needed to be successful at their jobs. Specifically, BESSD is in the process of defining the virtual call center and hosted UC account structure to allow all teleworkers to connect with the BESSD telephone solution. Currently, work arounds have been employed to meet the needs of the teleworkers.

Beginning the final week in March, BESSD closed the lobbies of all processing centers on all islands. As a safety measure to stop the spread of COVID-19, we continue to operate through telework strategies and skeleton crew staffing plans at these offices; however, BESSD plans to continue this approach until we are absolutely certain our communities are safe.

Further, until we have completed the retro-fitting of the lobbies and redefined the operations procedures for accepting lobby clients, our offices remain closed to the public as stated above.

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We envision this lobby closure strategy may continue to the end of December 2020, depending on the severity of the pandemic as the months progress.

Should you have any question or concerns, please contact me at [bdonohoe@dhs.hawaii.gov](mailto:bdonohoe@dhs.hawaii.gov) or (808) 586-5238.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Donohoe", written in a cursive style.

Brian Donohoe

Administrator

DHS-Benefit, Employment & Support Services Division

1010 Richards Street, Room 418

Honolulu, HI 96813