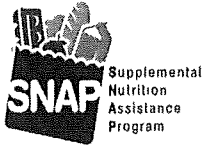


United States Department of Agriculture



Food and
Nutrition
Service

MA DEMONSTRATION REQUEST

**Expansion of Expedited Eligibility and Waiver Initial Interview
Demonstration Request**

Type of Request: Initial

Date of Request March 18, 2020

State: MA

Region: NERO

Statutory Citations

7 USC 2020(e)(9)(A-C) provide benefits no later than 7 days after the date of application to any household which—

- has gross income that is less than \$150 per month; or
- is a destitute migrant or a seasonal farmworker household in accordance with the regulations governing such households in effect July 1, 1982; and
- has liquid resources that do not exceed \$100;

(B) provide benefits no later than 7 days after the date of application to any household that has a combined gross income and liquid resources that is less than the monthly rent, or mortgage, and utilities of the household; and

(C) to the extent practicable, verify the income and liquid resources of a household referred to in subparagraph (A) or (B) prior to issuance of benefits to the household;

Regulatory Citations

7 CFR 273.2(e). Requires the State agency to conduct an interview.

7 CFR 273.2(i) Requires the State agency to establish the expedited processing standards including households eligible for expedited processing, interview and verification requirements.

Justification for Request

Due to the spread of the coronavirus, the President of the United States and the Governor of Massachusetts have declared a state of emergency. In Massachusetts, the Governor has instructed all non-essential state employees to stay home for March 16 and 17. Gatherings of more than 25 people are banned until April 7, schools have been closed statewide and bars and restaurants may only serve take-out and delivery. The President recommended against holding gatherings larger than 10 people. The Department's local field offices have been closed for the last two days and it is unclear if and when the offices will be fully operational. The Department is working with human resources and labor unions regarding running offices with only a skeletal staff. It is unclear at this time what the limitations on office staffing may be and for how long they may be operational.

The spread of coronavirus within Massachusetts has continued; the number of confirmed cases topping 200 over the last several days. The ripple effects from this virus are becoming apparent:

- The state Agency workforce has been negatively affected due to illness, the executive order, lack of childcare due to school closures and prophylactic quarantines.
- Higher SNAP application rates have been observed and are anticipated to continue as the economy stalls.

This executive order and the additional guidance from the President has had significant impacts on our ability to conduct regular operations. The Department has seen an increase in applications of close to four times its normal volume. The number of applications received in the time period succeeding the Governor's announcement totaled over 4,500 web applications, for context the average is 400-450 web applications daily.

Given the fluidity of our staffing situation the Department feels compelled to evaluate ways to streamline the application process. Given the Departments' current inability to process applications remotely it is necessary to ensure the growing number of individuals who have lost their income have access to SNAP benefits, especially in case we find ourselves in a place where the Department unable to process applications at all. Implementing these alternative procedures **as soon as possible** allows us to maximize the use of our skeletal staff for as long as they are able to be operational.

Description of Alternative Procedures

The state is proposing expanding the expedited eligibility criteria to all applications for assistance received during the state of emergency regardless of whether or not the household

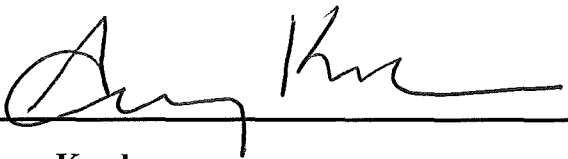
meets the entitlement provisions of 7 CFR 273.2(i)(1)(i)-(iii) assuming the information provided on the application meets income guidelines and citizenship requirements. The state will attempt a cold call to conduct an immediate interview and will use all available data sources to confirm information. Regardless of whether an interview is conducted, once an individual's identity and status has been verified the state would like to issue benefits for a special certification period of 3 months. Eligibility for benefits and the amount will be determined based on the information provided on the application, all data sources available to the Department and any verifications that accompany the application. Given the serious operational constraints and growing number of initial applications, the Department however does not want to be held to the 7 day expedited timeline as adhering to this time constraint seems highly unlikely.

Caseload information

Unknown at this time due to consistently changing circumstances. At present time this would be applied to a minimum of 4,500 applications.

Anticipated implementation date: March 18, 2020

Signature of requesting official:

Print Name: 
Amy Kershaw

Title: Commissioner

State Agency Contact

Name: Brittany Mangini, Director of Food Security and Nutrition Programs

Email: Brittany.mangini@state.ma.us

Telephone: 617-348-8534

Regional Office Contact

Name: Robin Magee

Name: Robin.Magee@usda.gov.

Name: 617-565-4677