

# SNAP COVID Adjustment Request and Transition Plan Summary

(The document should be no more than one page and is meant to be a high-level summary for reference).

In order to receive approval, a State must demonstrate that the adjustments continue to be warranted given the current circumstances in the State and provide data to support extension.

## State Agency and Region:

North Carolina/SERO

## What Adjustment(s) is the State Requesting (e.g. core verification and interview adjustment)

*Telephonic signature.* Grants additional flexibility than permitted under the State option in allowing States to document in writing in the case file that a client verbally attested to the information provided on the application, instead of requiring an audio recording of the verbal attestation to constitute a valid telephonic signature.

**Demonstrated Need for Extension of the Adjustment** (This should be based on operational data provided by the State, not a narrative. Data to support requests would be expected to include data on including lessened workforce capacity, increased recertifications, and/or increased case actions, among other supporting information.)

- FNS Enrollment has increased by nearly 150,000 households and 290,433 recipients Statewide since the first week of March 2020 through the week ending on 8/2/2020. This is a 25% increase in enrollment over a 5-month period.
- Between 3/1/2020 and 8/4/2020, NC has received 266,139 applications for Food and Nutrition Services, as compared to 244,476 (a 9% increase)
- The discontinuance of Pandemic Unemployment Benefits could result in another spike in applications, which coupled with the unprecedented levels of 6-month recerts coming in October and November, will further strain an already overwhelmed safety net.
- 86% of our local county DSS offices continue to limit public interactions or are open for appointments only, restricting in person interaction for customers.
- NC Governor's has extended Phase II of the executive order. This has impacted the public school's return to the classroom. Three plans were put in place – Plan A, all students return to the classroom, Plan B, limit student density in facilities to no greater than 50% occupancy and Plan C - no students in school facilities. Over 50% of NC school districts selected Plan C and will have school age children attending school remotely which means more children at home and more demands of parent's time, both staff and clients. This will negatively impact time availability for FNS workers and program requirements such as providing a signature opposed to temporarily allowing a telephonic signature.

**How Does the State Plan to Transition to the New Normal** *(The State should provide the region with a detailed plan that shows how and when the State will return to its “new normal” -- that is a steady operation that may in fact entail higher caseloads than experienced pre-Covid -- including a phased in approach.*

On March 10, 2020, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper issued a Declaration of State of Emergency under Executive Order 116, which will, at minimum, remain in effect through Phase 3 of COVID-19 pandemic. North Carolina’s Phase 3 was originally scheduled to begin between June 19, 2020 and July 3, 2020 but has been delayed due to an increased number of COVID-19 cases. In the meantime, North Carolina’s Phase 2 has been extended through September 11, 2020. This delay has caused many NC counties and the state office to delay the transition back to working in the office and to continue working remotely. As the COVID-19 case count decreases and we move into normal operations a transitional plan will be required from all 100 counties. North Carolina will consider normal operations when the following conditions are met:

- Governor moves the state into Phase 3.
- All 100 Department of Social Services (DSS) local offices are open for in-person interactions.
- All 100 DSS agencies have no barriers to assisting the public while maintaining appropriate social distancing.

Phase 3 detailed transitional plans will be required of all 100 county DSS agencies within 14 days of the state entering into Phase 3 and must contain a plan on how the local agency will address the following issues:

- How will counties safely maintain social distancing with in-person interactions?
- If city or county ordinance exist, how will the local agency accommodate those requirements?
- How will counties ensure they will maintain appropriate levels of staff to maintain timely services?
- Ensure all staff are equipped with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves and hand sanitizer.
- Provide verification that all staff have been trained on proper social distancing protocols.
- Explain in detail any changes to service that have been taken to maintain level of service while practicing social distancing.

Operational Support Team (OST) staff will assist DSS agencies with the development of a transition plan.

Plans submitted by local agencies for return to in-person interaction will be reviewed by Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Based on the county established timelines for reaching their new normal, the DHHS will develop a statewide schedule to monitor the implementation or transition and provide additional support to the counties as needed to ensure a successful transition.