

WAIVER REQUEST - NEW JERSEY

1. **TYPE OF REQUEST:** Initial
2. **REGULATION CITATION:** 7 CFR 273.2(i) [7 USC 2020(e)(9)]
3. **STATE:** New Jersey
4. **REGION:** Mid-Atlantic Region
5. **REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS:** In accordance with 7 CFR 273.2(i) establish the expedited processing standards including households eligible for expedited processing, interview and verification requirements.
6. **DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES:** New Jersey is operating under a State of Emergency declared by Governor Murphy on March 9, 2020 relating to the public health crisis caused by the coronavirus. There are currently over 6,400 cases in the United States. 267 of these cases are in NJ with over 1,800 additional cases in adjoining states (Retrieved from <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> on March 18, 2020 at 07:00). Social distancing is the primary non-hygiene related preventative measure identified to prevent the spread of this communicable disease.

On March 13, 2020, President Trump declared “that the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States constitutes a national emergency” retroactive to March 1, 2020. Since the President’s Emergency Proclamation, New Jersey’s has seen a 534% increase in the number of individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19. Extended school closures have been mandated for all school districts in New Jersey effective March 18, 2020. County Boards of Social Services are experiencing significant staffing deficiencies as the workers struggle to balance caring for their children and working to serve SNAP applicants/recipients. Additionally, local public health officials are mandating closures of county facilities in some areas and/or significant reductions in staffing levels.

In an effort to control social contact among all parties (e.g. applicants, eligibility workers, etc.), and to maintain access to SNAP with limited staffing, New Jersey proposes to process all applications using expedited processing standards and to waive the application interview. All new applications for assistance will be treated as expedited cases regardless of whether or not the household meets the entitlement provisions of 7 CFR 273.2(i)(1)(i)-(iii).

Additionally, New Jersey requests authority to postpone the eligibility interview requirement. Postponement of the expedited interview is something that FNS has approved in the past. New Jersey recognizes that FNS has issued guidance that terminates all approved expedited interview waivers effective April 2020; however, the current public health emergency merits FNS not only extending the waiver for states that already have it

in place, but also by approving new states to use this efficiency in the face of this public health crisis.

Verifications will be handled in accordance with 7 CFR 273.2(i)(4) which requires the verification of identity. Reasonable efforts will be made to verify additional elements of eligibility prior to benefit issuance, but will not delay the issuance of benefits.

COVID Expedited Processing

For each SNAP application received during the public health emergency New Jersey will:

- Verify the identity of the applicant. An effort will be made to verify identity using documentary evidence; however, the local office may use data sources to confirm that the applicant's name, date of birth and social security number all match records available to the State/Local office from the Social Security Administration.
 - Issue expedited SNAP benefits, and mail an EBT card to the household.
 - Schedule an eligibility interview, to be conducted via telephone, for a time prior to the expiration of the expedited certification period.
 - Complete the interview, request/review mandatory verifications, and render a final eligibility determination.
7. **JUSTIFICATION FOR REQUEST:** This request is justified pursuant to 7 CFR 272.3(c)(1)(iii) which permits FNS to authorize waivers when "unique geographic or climatic conditions within a State preclude effective implementation of the specific regulatory provision and require an alternate procedure." The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions in the administration of SNAP offices throughout the state of New Jersey. Additionally, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (HR6201) which permits broad authority for the USDA to approve adjustments in "issuance methods and application and reporting requirement under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008".
8. **ANTICIPATED IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS AND STATE AGENCY OPERATIONS:** New Jersey believes that this waiver will improve the public health response to the spread of the coronavirus.
9. **CASELOAD INFORMATION, INCLUDING PERCENT, CHARACTERISTICS, AND QUALITY CONTROL ERROR RATE FOR AFFECTION PORTION:** In 2019, New Jersey averaged approximately 13,000 applications each month.

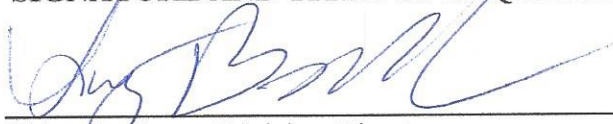
ANTICIPATED IMPLEMENTATION DATE AND TIME PERIOD FOR WHICH WAIVER IS NEEDED: This waiver would be implemented immediately upon approval and would remain in effect for 60 days or until the New Jersey State of Emergency is lifted, whichever is later.

10. **PROPOSED QUALITY CONTROL REVIEW PROCEDURES:** The COVID Expedited processed case will not require any special quality control procedures. Cases granted benefits using the COVID Expedited process will be included in the universe of Active cases subject to selection according the NJ SNAP QC Sampling Plan. Cases will be reviewed using standard review procedures in the FNS Handbook 310.

11. STATE AGENCY SUBMITTING WAIVER REQUEST AND STATE CONTACT PERSON:

New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development
Natasha Johnson, Assistant Commissioner

12. SIGNATURE AND TITLE OF REQUESTING OFFICIAL:



Title: Assistant Division Director

Email for transmission of response: Larry.braasch@dhs.nj.gov

13. DATE OF REQUEST: March 18, 2020

14. REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT PERSON (TO BE COMPLETED BY FNS REGIONAL OFFICE)