

What Adjustment(s) is the State Requesting (e.g. adjustments that extend certification periods and waive periodic reports, eliminate the interview at certification and recertification, and postpone expedited service interview)

Eliminate Interview at Certification and Recertification – COV - 1112

Demonstrated Need for Extension of the Adjustment

As of August 21, 2020, the Division of Welfare and Supportive Services has a backlog of over 23,133 SNAP tasks, a 278% increase over our normal number of tasks. Nevada has seen a 48% increase in SNAP participants from July 26-August 14. Nevada anticipates a 25% increase in SNAP caseloads by September 1st.

On June 16, 2020, a T-1 line was destroyed in a lightning storm in Southern Nevada. While DWSS has been successfully able to take advantage of all available technology to process applications, unfortunately the destruction of the T-1 line has caused numerous issues for our telework staff, which represents 75% of front-line eligibility staff. Our telework staff were not able to access any DWSS systems from June 16 through June 25, in turn 25% of our staff had to process everything during that timeframe. As of August 21st, issue has not been completely resolved, and we are still experiencing issues in accessing our eligibility systems.

Due to a spike in COVID-19 cases, Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak announce effective July 10 at 11:59, the State of Nevada is partially reverting back to Phase 1 of the State's reopening. This will cause further delays in the full reopening of our eligibility offices. If the COVID-19 cases continue to rise, it is possible that the Governor will mandate another closure of state offices. As of August 21,2020, the two largest counties in Nevada, Clark County and Washoe Counties are still operating under Phase 1 of the Governor's "Roadmap To Recovery". This has impeded our ability to increase staff and customer capacity in our eligibility offices. Over 95% of our eligibility offices are in Clark and Washoe Counties.

Nevada is currently facing a 1.3-billion-dollar budget deficit for 2021, this dollar figure represents more than 25% of the State's operating budget. On July 8, 2020, Governor Steve Sisolak, convened the Nevada State Legislature into a special session. The Division of Welfare and Supportive Services will likely face cuts in staff, which will further reduce our capacity to serve our SNAP recipients. As a result of the special session, the Division of Welfare and Supportive Services has been under a hiring freeze since July 19, 2020. Currently the Division has 53 Family Service Specialists positions, and 38 Administrative Staff positions, that we are not able to fill. Additionally, effective January 1, 2021, all state of Nevada employees will be required to take 6 unpaid days off through the month of June 2021.

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

Moving forward to a "new normal" is difficult to project at this time. The Governor's guidelines clearly mandate we wait until phase four before we are allowed to move back to full operations. DWSS has prepared a Lobby Opening Plan, The plan outlines how our front line eligibility offices will operate under phases two and three. In anticipation of Phase 2 of the State's reopening, DWSS drafted a lobby reopening plan, targeting June 15, as the date our offices would reopen. On June 15, 2020, DWSS office's reopened with 25% of our staff, while 75% worked from home to adhere to the Governor's strict guidelines on social distancing per the guidance outlined in Phase 2 of "Nevada United Roadmap To Recovery."

To allow for strict social distancing, interior lines must be queued by placing provided blue painter's tape at six-foot intervals while allowing a six-foot distance in all directions. The lobby should not be used as a waiting room during the initial opening phase. Limited seating should only be provided for disabled customers while focusing on taking care of the customer during the initial contact at the front desk. Interviews will not be conducted face-to-face if at all possible. Customers will be directed to a sanitized interview booth by front desk staff after being entered into the PathOS or LMS systems with a contact number. Customers will be contacted by a worker and entire interview will be conducted over the phone. Notices of decision (NODs) and requests for information (RFIs) may be mailed to reduce contact, unless the customer does not have a secure mailing address (e.g. general delivery) or other extenuating circumstance; however, managers have the discretion to expand on this practice based on demographics provided there is a Plexiglas barrier present for any face-to-face contact.

Regional Assessment: