
WEST VIRGINIA CODE CHAPTER 9
ARTICLE 8

WV Legislature

§9-8-1. Definitions.

As used in this article:

"Able bodied adult" means a person between the ages of 18 and 49 years of age without dependents and who does not meet any of the exemptions set forth in §9-8-2(a) of this code.

"Applicant" or "recipient" means a person who is applying for, or currently receiving, public assistance in the State of West Virginia from the department.

"Department" means the Department of Human Services.

"Electronic benefit transfer" or "EBT" means any electronic system which allows the department to issue and track benefits via a magnetically encoded payment card.

"Good cause" means circumstances beyond the household's control, including, but not limited to, illness, illness of another household member requiring the presence of the member, a household emergency, natural disaster, a declared state of emergency due to inclement weather, or the unavailability of transportation.

"Public assistance" means government benefits provided to qualifying individuals on the basis of need to provide basic necessities to individuals and their families. These shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (A) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP;
- (B) Medicaid; and
- (C) Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF.

"Secretary" means the Secretary of the Department of Human Services.

"Work" or "working" means:

- (A) Work in exchange for money;
- (B) Work in exchange for goods or services ("in kind" work);
- (C) Unpaid work, verified under standards established by the department in rule; or
- (D) Any combination thereof.

§9-8-2. Work requirements.

(a) All able bodied adults may receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance benefits for only three months in each 36-month period. Recipients are exempt from the time limit if they are employed or are participating and complying with the requirements of a work, education, or volunteer program for at least 20 hours per week: Provided, That further exemptions may apply and shall be determined in accordance with federal law: Provided, however, That any such exemptions shall not exceed those granted by federal law.

(b) Beginning October 1, 2018, the department shall discontinue and shall not seek federal waivers granted pursuant to 7 U.S.C. § 2015(o) for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) for any county that cannot be demonstrated to have, through data in conformance with U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics methodology set forth under federal law, a recent 12-month average unemployment rate above 10 percent; a recent 24-month average unemployment rate 20 percent above the national average for the same 24-month period; qualification for extended unemployment benefits; or designation as a "labor surplus area" by the U.S. Department of Labor. These waivers exempt able bodied adults with no children from work requirements for receipt of SNAP benefits. Notwithstanding any provision in this code to the contrary, all counties shall be ineligible for any such waiver effective October 1, 2022.

(c) The department shall submit a report to the Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Resources Accountability, no later than October 1, 2020, on the employment impact of ABAWD requirements in those counties where they were implemented as of October 1, 2018. The report shall include, on a county-by-county basis, information on the number of SNAP recipients subject to work requirements; the number exempted from work requirements and the reasons for exemption; the number of applicants denied benefits due to non-compliance with work requirements; the dollar amount of benefits withheld due to non-compliance; the estimated fiscal impact on SNAP retailers of withholding those benefits; the number of recipients who engaged in work, education, or volunteerism in order to maintain benefits; the efforts made to assist recipients with meeting work requirements in order to maintain benefits; and any such recommendations pertaining to work requirements as the department deems advisable.

(d) If a recipient resides in a county subject to the provisions of this article, an applicant shall be deemed as complying with the requirements of a work, education, or volunteer program if any of the following requirements are satisfied:

- (1) Working at least 20 hours per week, averaged monthly, or 80 hours a month;
- (2) Participating in, and complying with, the requirements of a work force training program of 20 hours per week, as determined by the department in rule;
- (3) Volunteering 20 hours a week, as determined by the department in rule;

(4) Any combination of working, volunteering and/or participating in a work program for a total of 20 hours per week, as determined by the department in legislative rule; or

(5) Participating in, and complying with, a workfare program as set out in 7 C.F.R. 273.24(a)(3).

(e) As determined by the department, if a recipient would have worked an average of 20 hours per week but missed some work for good cause, the recipient shall be considered to have met the work requirement if the absence from work is temporary and the recipient retains his or her job. Good cause includes circumstances beyond the household's control, such as, but not limited to, illness, illness of another household member requiring the presence of the member, a household emergency, natural disaster, a declared state of emergency due to inclement weather, or the unavailability of transportation.

(f) If the department determines that a waiver, or an amendment to a waiver, is necessary to implement a policy that complies with 7 C.F.R. 273.24, it shall request the waiver or the amendment to the waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture.

(g) The department shall propose legislative rules in accordance with the provisions of this code for a plan for implementation of the requirements set forth in this section in counties that are subject to the requirements set forth in §9-8-2 (d) of this code.

§9-8-3. Income and identity verification.

(a) By December 31, 2018, the department shall redesign an existing system or establish a new computerized income, asset, and identity eligibility verification system or contract with a third-party vendor to verify eligibility, eliminate the duplication of assistance, and deter waste, fraud, and abuse in each public assistance program which it administers.

(b) The department may contract with a third-party vendor to develop a system to provide a service or verify income, assets, and identity eligibility of applicants to prevent fraud, misrepresentation, and inadequate documentation when determining eligibility for public assistance. This system or service shall be accessed prior to determining eligibility, periodically between eligibility redeterminations, and during eligibility redeterminations and reviews. The department may contract with a vendor to provide information to facilitate reviews of recipient eligibility conducted by the department.

(c) A contract made pursuant to this section may not include a provision that provides the vendor with a monetary incentive for reducing the number of recipients.

(d) Nothing in this article precludes the department from continuing to conduct additional eligibility verification processes currently in practice.

§9-8-4. Eligibility verification.

All applications for benefits must be processed through a system as set forth in this article. Complete applications, including the interview, shall be processed within 10 days of receipt or the maximum period required by federal law. Prior to determining eligibility, the department shall access information for every applicant from federal, state, and other sources: Provided, That such access does not violate any federal law.

§9-8-5. Identity authentication.

(a) Prior to awarding public assistance, applicants for benefits must complete a computerized identity authentication process to confirm the identity of the applicant. This shall be done with a knowledge-based questionnaire consisting of financial and/or personal questions. The questionnaire must contain questions tailored to assist persons without a bank account or those who have poor access to financial and banking services or who do not have an established credit history. The questionnaire may be submitted online, in-person, or via telephone.

(b) The department shall submit a report to the Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Resources Accountability regarding the feasibility of implementing the photo EBT card option under 7 U.S.C. § 2016(h)(9). The study shall address certain operational issues to ensure that state implementation would be consistent with all federal requirements, and that program access is protected for participating households, including, but not limited to, allowing the recipient to designate permitted users for purposes of utilizing the photo EBT card.

§9-8-6. Case review.

(a) If the information obtained from the review provided in this article does not result in the department finding a discrepancy or change in an applicant's or recipient's circumstances affecting eligibility, the department shall not take any further action and shall continue processing the application.

(b) If the review results in a discrepancy, the department shall promptly redetermine eligibility.

§9-8-7. Notice and right to be heard.

(a) An applicant shall be given written notice and the opportunity to explain any issues with the application or redetermination as set forth in §9-8-6 of this code. Self-declarations by applicants or recipients shall be accepted as verification of categorical and financial eligibility if no other verification source is available. In cases requiring expedited services an applicant's statement may be temporarily accepted until such time as verification is possible.

(b) The notice given to the applicant or recipient is required to describe the circumstances of the issue, the manner in which the applicant or recipient may respond, and the consequences of failing to take action. If the applicant does not respond timely as required by federal law, the department shall take appropriate action. The department may request additional information as it finds necessary to reach a decision.

(c) An individual may respond in writing, electronically, or verbally. If an individual responds verbally, staff shall note the time and contents of the response in the individual's file. The response by the individual may:

(1) Disagree with the findings of the department. The department shall reinvestigate the matter if the applicant or recipient disagrees. If the department finds that there has been an error, the department shall take immediate action to correct it. If the department determines that there is no error, the department shall determine the effect of the response on the applicant's or recipient's case and take appropriate action. Written notice of the department's action shall be given to the applicant or recipient; or

(2) Agree with the findings of the department. The department shall determine the effect on the applicant's or recipient's case and take appropriate action. Written notice of the department's action shall be given to the applicant or recipient.

(d) If the applicant fails to respond to the notice, the department shall deny or discontinue assistance for failure to verify information. Eligibility for assistance may not be established or reestablished until the issue has been resolved.

§9-8-8. Referrals for fraud, misrepresentation or inadequate documentation.

(a) After the case review as set forth in §9-8-6 of this code, the department shall refer cases of suspected fraud to the Office of Inspector General within the department. That office shall take appropriate action, including civil penalties or referral to an appropriate prosecuting attorney for criminal prosecution.

(b) In cases of substantiated fraud, upon conviction, the state shall review all appropriate legal options. These may include, but are not limited to, removal from other public assistance programs and garnishment of wages or state income tax refunds until the department recovers an equal amount of benefits fraudulently claimed.

(c) The department may refer suspected cases of fraud, misrepresentation, or inadequate documentation to appropriate agencies, divisions, or departments for review of eligibility issues in other public assistance programs. This should also include cases in which an individual is determined to be no longer eligible for the original program.

§9-8-9. Reporting to the Governor and Legislature.

The department shall prepare an annual report by January 15 each year to the Governor and Legislative Oversight Commission on Health and Human Resources Accountability. The report shall contain information on the effectiveness and general findings of the eligibility verification system, including the number of cases reviewed, the number of case closures, the number of referrals for criminal prosecution, recovery of improper payment, collection of civil penalties, the outcomes of cases referred to the Office of Inspector General, and any savings that have resulted from the system.

§9-8-10. Prohibitions on use of electronic benefit transfer cards.

(a) To ensure that public assistance program funds are used for their intended purposes, funds available on electronic benefit transfer cards may not be used to purchase alcohol, liquor or imitation liquor, cigarettes, tobacco products, bail, gambling activities, lottery tickets, tattoos, travel services provided by a travel agent, money transmission to locations abroad, sexually oriented adult materials, concert tickets, professional or collegiate sporting event tickets, or tickets for other entertainment events intended for the general public.

(b) Electronic benefit transfer card transactions are prohibited at all casinos, gaming establishments, tattoo parlors, massage parlors, body piercing parlors, spas, nail salons, lingerie shops, vapor cigarette stores, psychic or fortune-telling businesses, bail bond companies, video arcades, movie theaters, swimming pools, cruise ships, theme parks, dog or horse racing facilities, pari-mutuel facilities, sexually oriented businesses, retail establishments which provide adult-oriented entertainment in which performers disrobe or perform in an unclothed state for entertainment, and businesses or retail establishments where minors under age 18 are not permitted.

(c) Upon enrollment, the department shall provide all applicants with an itemized list of prohibited purchases, including those specified in this section, and make such list available on the department's website.

(d) If a recipient is found to have violated the provisions of this section, the department shall issue a warning in writing to the recipient. The recipient is subject to disqualification of benefits for up to three months following the first offense, for up to one year following the second offense, and a permanent termination of benefits following the third offense, unless expressly prohibited by federal law.

§9-8-11. Tracking out-of-state spending.

(a) The department shall post on its website and provide to the Joint Committee on Government and Finance a report of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefit spending on or before January 15 of each year.

(b) The report required by this section shall include:

(1) The dollar amount and number of transactions of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits that are accessed or spent out-of-state, by state;

(2) The dollar amount and number of transactions of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits that are accessed or spent out-of-state, by state;

(3) The dollar amount, number of transactions and times of transactions of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits that are accessed or spent in-state, by retailer, institution or location; and

(4) The dollar amount, number of transactions and times of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families transactions of benefits that are accessed or spent in-state, disaggregated by retailer, institution, or location.

(c) The report required pursuant to this section shall not identify individual recipients.

§9-8-12. Rulemaking.

The secretary may promulgate rules for legislative approval in accordance with the provisions of §29A-3-1 et seq. of this code which he or she finds necessary to effectuate the provisions of this article.

WV Legislature