



Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

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General Information System (GIS) Message

Section 1

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| Transmittal: | 21 TA/DC016 Upstate and New York City |
| Date: | March 29, 2021 |
| To: | Subscribers |
| Suggested Distribution: | Commissioners, TA Directors, SNAP Directors, HEAP Coordinators, WMS Coordinators, Medicaid Directors |
| From: | Jeffrey Gaskell, Deputy Commissioner Employment and Income Support Programs |
| Subject: | COVID-19 TA Waiver Extension Dates and SNAP Interview Waiver Extensions |
| Effective Date: | Immediately |
| Contact Information: | Temporary Assistance (TA) Questions, TA Bureau (518) 474-9344 or otda.sm.cees.tabureau@otda.ny.gov Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Bureau Questions (518) 473-1469 or otda.sm.cees.snap@otda.ny.gov HEAP Bureau Questions (518) 473-0332 or NYSHEAP@otda.ny.gov |

Section 2

In response to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the declaration of a State disaster emergency (Executive Order 202, March 7, 2020), the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) released a series of policy documents which advised social services districts (districts) of immediate measures that could be taken to simplify and streamline program administration and protect the health and safety of clients and staff. These measures, which are set to expire on March 31, 2021, have been extended through June 30, 2021.

Additionally, Title VI, Section 4603(a)(1)(B) of the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act, the Continuing Resolution (CR) passed by Congress and signed into law by the President on October 1, 2020, reinstated the lapsed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) interview adjustment waivers originally authorized under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The CR reinstated and extended the *availability* of these waivers through June 30, 2021.

The purpose of this GIS is to inform social services districts (districts) about the availability of the following waivers through close of business June 30, 2021, and to remind the districts about the guidance governing their application.

- Allowing TA eligibility interviews to be conducted by phone;
- Allowing TA recertification interviews to be conducted by phone;
- Allowing drug/alcohol and domestic violence screenings to be conducted over the phone;

- Extending domestic violence waivers;
- Enabling districts with local procedures or other processes that require frequent contact with individuals experiencing homelessness and residing in emergency housing to conduct these contacts via phone, with reduced frequency, as appropriate for the population;
- Allowing temporary modifications to previously approved Case Supervisor Review (CSR) plans; and,
- Adjusting interview requirements for households applying for SNAP at initial application and recertification.

These measures are outlined in greater detail in [20 TA/DC016](#), [20 TA/DC028](#), [20 TA/DC041](#), [20 TA/DC043](#), [20 TA/DC057](#), [20 TA/DC072](#), [20 TA/DC078](#), [20-LCM-08](#) and [20 TA/DC113](#). The SNAP interview adjustment waivers originally were described in [20 TA/DC022](#), [20 TA/DC026](#), and [20 TA/DC096](#). This guidance extends their availability through **June 30, 2021**.

District participation in the TA waivers listed above is not mandated. Districts can choose which, if any, waivers they want to participate in and the time period during which they want to utilize them. Districts who choose not to participate in one or more of the above waivers through June 30, 2021, must send an email to OTDA at: otda.sm.cees.tabureau@otda.ny.gov and indicate which waiver provisions they are opting out of and/or the shorter time period for which they will be utilizing the waivers.

The availability of the telephonic signature waivers, first announced in [20 TA/DC049](#), (including [20 TA/DC049-Attachment-1](#) and [20 TA/DC049-Attachment-2](#)) and extended in [20 TA/DC090](#), also are being extended through June 30, 2021. A recap of the telephonic signature policy is provided below. Any districts that have not currently implemented this waiver, but which are now interested in doing so, must notify OTDA of their intent.

Waiver of SNAP regulatory requirements for telephonic signatures:

Currently, federal regulations at 7 CFR 273.2(c)(viii)(B), and (C) provide as set forth below:

- 7 CFR 273.2(c)(7)(viii)(B) requires that, to constitute a valid telephonic signature for SNAP, the district's telephonic signature system must make an audio recording of the household's verbal assent and a summary of the information to which the household assents. An example of a telephonic signature is a recording of "Yes" or "No", "I agree" or "I do not agree", or otherwise clearly indicating agreement or disagreement during an interview over the telephone.
- 7 CFR 273.2(c)(7)(viii)(C) requires that a telephonic signature system must provide for linkage from the audio file of the recorded verbal assent to the SNAP application so that the district has ready access to the household's entire case file.

The Continuing Appropriations Act of 2021 and Other Extensions Act extended the waivers to the requirements of 7 CFR 273.2(c)(viii)(B) and (C). Until close of business June 30, 2021 districts will be permitted to accept TA, SNAP, or MA on a TA case applications and signatures over the telephone. Districts that choose to offer the option of telephone applications must:

- Read the entire application to the telephone applicant. The district must read the program-specific OTDA script (attached to this GIS, one for TA, SNAP or MA on a TA case applications and one for SNAP-only applications) and obtain a verbal consent from the applicant, which shall be documented by the district.
- Document, in the case record, the following: (1) that the applicant was read the entire application, verbally attested to the information provided on the application, and that the applicant has signed the application; (2) the applicant's name, date and time of application; (3) a summary of the information to which the applicant verbally assents; and, (4) the applicant's responses indicating agreement or disagreement.

- If an applicant submits an application without a signature and the district is able to connect with the applicant over the telephone, the district must also note on the application that verbal attestation of the signature was given as well as the time and date of the verbal attestation of signature. For TA cases, as required in the TA, SNAP, or MA on a TA case script, the verbal assent of both the applicant and the applicant's spouse must be obtained and noted on the application.
- The application filing date is the date that the verbal signature was obtained.
- All telephone applicants must be provided with a written copy of their completed application ([LDSS-2921](#) or local equivalent) with instructions for a simple procedure for correcting any errors or omissions.
- TA, SNAP or MA on a TA case applicants in Rest of State (ROS) should be provided with a second copy of the application with instructions that the applicant and all applying adults must apply an ink signature (a "wet signature") on all signature lines and return the signed application to the district within thirty days.
- TA, SNAP or MA on a TA case applicants in New York City should be provided with an Authorization To Repay Public Assistance Benefits From Retroactive SSI [W-148A] with instructions that the applicant and all applying adults must sign the form(s) and return the signed form(s) to the New York City Department of Social Services within thirty days.
- It is recommended that any mailing to the client that requires the return of information should include a self-addressed, stamped envelope so that the client can easily return the information to the district.
- If more than thirty days passes and the district has not received the required signed application or the New York City W-148A (as applicable), the district must determine, on a case-by-case basis whether good cause exists for the client's failure to return the signed document. If it does, the application may be approved if otherwise eligible and the district must obtain (for example, by home visit) a signature on the applications as soon as it is safe and practicable. If good cause for failure to return the signed document does not exist, the application must be denied.
- This new telephone signature process will be limited to those households who submit an application over the telephone or who have submitted a paper application without a signature.
- For SNAP applicants only, households will still be permitted to submit an application over the telephone with only name, address and signature to establish a filing date. If the application is incomplete rendering the applicant unable to attest to the information required by the application by providing their signature on the consent and authorization page, the district would need to get a second verbal signature prior to the issuance of benefits. An initial signature on an incomplete application will only hold the filing date and is insufficient for an eligibility determination.
- Districts must continue to accept paper applications with signatures and online applications with electronic signatures.
- Districts must ensure that sufficient controls are in place for policies and automated processes to implement the terms of the telephone signature waiver correctly, including maintaining a sufficient number of telephone lines to accept calls and a sufficient number of staff to accept applications by telephone.
- Districts must continue to comply with all other applicable interview and signature requirements such as, but not limited to, drug and alcohol screenings and domestic violence screenings.
- Districts will comply with the provision of any data required for evaluation of telephone applications. The script is based on the expectation that the applicant will complete the application, that the

worker will be reading and reviewing all the information required on the [LDSS-2921](#) with the applicant and reading to the applicant all of the notices, assignments, authorizations, consents and penalty warnings in such application and reviewing the Rights and Responsibilities as contained in the Rights and Responsibilities booklet [LDSS-4148B](#).

Temporary Assistance

Upstate

Districts choosing to implement telephone applications must use the OTDA TA, SNAP or MA on a TA case script and must update the case record indicating that the applicant assents to and allows a verbal signature.

Upon completion of a telephone application, districts must send a completed LDSS-2921 application (or approved local equivalent), to the applicant with instructions that the applicant and all applying adults sign the application on all signature lines and return the signed application to the district within thirty days of the telephone application date. The application date must be the date the telephone application took place.

Districts must track telephone applications for TA, SNAP or MA on a TA case by entering TEL in either the Office (Ofc), Unit or Worker field on Screen 1 in WMS.

New York City

New York City must use the OTDA TA, SNAP or MA on a TA case script and must update the case record indicating that the applicant assents to and allows a verbal signature.

Upon completion of a telephone application, New York City must send a completed [LDSS 2921](#) application (or such approved local equivalent) to all applicants. TA applicants must also be sent the IAR authorization form [Form W-148A] with instructions that the applicant and all applying adults sign the form(s) and return the form(s) to the district within thirty days. The application date must be the date the telephone application took place.

Additionally, New York City must systemically track all telephone applications using a method communicated to OTDA prior to implementation of the process.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Upstate

Districts that opt to implement the Telephone Signature waiver must ensure that each applicant interviewed is read the SNAP telephone signature script if applying for SNAP-only or the TA, SNAP or MA on a TA case telephone script if applying for those programs.

The district will then document this method of signature was used by inserting the SNAP Interview code "H" in Screen 1. This will allow for tracking of the total number of cases authorized for reporting purposes.

Please note that, for households that have filed a paper application for SNAP and may have signed the front page of the application (page 2 of the [LDSS-4826](#)) but have not provided the certification signature (page 8 of the LDSS-4826), the certification signature may be captured telephonically using the procedures described above.

Once the application has been accepted, the telephone signature authorized and the required notes are entered into the case file, the district must ensure the applicant is sent a copy of the completed application and authorization of signature with instructions for a simple procedure for correcting any errors or omissions in accordance with 7 CFR 273.2(c)(viii)(D); an alternative method of notification would be the use of a manual notice summarizing the application submission and the agreement of the applicant to the telephone signature.

New York City

New York City must ensure that each applicant interviewed using the Telephone Signature Waiver option is read the SNAP telephone signature script if applying for SNAP-only or the TA SNAP or MA on a TA case telephone signature script if applying for those programs.

New York City must then systemically track the telephone signatures using a method communicated to OTDA prior to implementation of the process, for reporting purposes.

Once the application has been accepted, the telephone signature authorized and noted in the case file, the district must ensure the applicant is sent a written copy of their completed application (which includes their authorization of signature) with instructions for a simple procedure for correcting any errors or omissions in accordance with 7 CFR 273.2(c)(viii)(D).

Medicaid with TA

Districts choosing to implement telephone applications for MA on a TA case must note in the case record that the applicant assents to and allows a verbal signature for Medicaid.

SNAP Interviews at Initial Application and Recertification

Districts will not be required to interview households applying for SNAP at initial application or recertification, provided that **both** of the following conditions have been met:

- the applicant's identity has been verified; and,
- all other mandatory information and verification has been provided and is valid.

If either of these conditions has **not** been met, then an interview will be required according to regular interview policy and processes. Districts will be required to interview the household if any of the information or verification submitted is unclear or cannot be verified through separate verified-upon-receipt data matches. Every attempt shall be made to verify household circumstances through data matching and information currently present in the State and district systems.

Initial SNAP Applications Eligible for Expedited Processing

As districts are aware, for applications eligible for expedited processing, the only information that must be verified prior to the initial expedited issuance is the applicant's identity. As a reminder, an applicant's identity can be verified via the SSN validation process in accordance with Section III.E.1 of [12-INF-06](#). All other verification required and necessary to establish eligibility for ongoing benefits and to determine the ongoing benefit amount may be pended but must be provided prior to the issuance of ongoing SNAP benefits.

Until June 30, 2021, any applications for SNAP that are screened and found eligible for expedited processing, if the identity of the applicant has been verified, and if sufficient information for making a determination of eligibility and for calculating a benefit has been provided (verification of this information can be pended), the application may be processed and an expedited benefit issued without an interview being attempted or taking place. **Please note, districts are not prohibited from doing interviews, just not required.**

When processing an application for **ongoing** SNAP benefits, if all mandatory verification has been submitted prior to the issuance of ongoing benefits, no interview is required.

Mandatory Verification

Federal regulation 7 CFR 237.2(f) requires the following information to be verified at application. SNAP policy guidance on the verification of the following mandatory eligibility factors has not changed in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency:

1. Identity
2. Social Security Number
3. Residency
4. Gross non-exempt income (earned and unearned)
5. Disability
6. Alien eligibility

Under **federal** rules, verification of other eligibility factors, such as household size and composition, shelter cost and utility expenses are only required if the information provided is questionable. (See Section III.D of [12-INF-06](#) for a definition of questionable information.)

Please see [12-INF-06](#) for further information regarding SNAP verification policy.