

SNAP COVID Adjustment Request and Transition Plan Summary

State Agency and Region:

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Northeast Region

What Adjustment(s) is the State Requesting)

- Core verification and interview adjustment

Demonstrated Need for Extension of the Adjustment

The state is projecting that for each month associated with the initial spikes caused by COVID-19 there will be due, *on average*, approximately 12,000 more recertifications and interim reports, and approximately 14,500 more interviews, than in the comparable time period from last year.

Demonstrated in the attached waiver is a snapshot of the anticipated volume of periodic reports and recertifications for the months of October – December of 2020. The state is anticipating a 71%, 79% and 70% increase in workload associated with recertifications and periodic reports for October, November and December 2020, respectively.

How Does the State Plan to Transition to the New Normal

Massachusetts state government is still very much in the midst of developing its response to the COVID-19 public health emergency and the consequent economic fall-out. The state recently paused re-opening plans due to an uptick in COVID-19 infections. There is an extensive planning process underway across state government about how state services, including those offered by DTA, will be delivered in a future, post-COVID world. This planning includes how in-person services will be delivered, the role of remote work and technology as well as numerous other factors. Plans at the state level are still underway and, as these further develop, DTA will be in a position to provide FNS a more detailed plan for its future operational structure.

State's response to workload associated with increased caseload size

In the meantime, DTA's current plan to manage the increase in workload includes:

- On-boarding 53 new SNAP eligibility workers who will complete training by October 2020;
- Internal promotional opportunities for a minimum of another 50 administrative staff to become SNAP eligibility workers;
- Implementation of Optical Character Recognition technology to significantly automate our paper interim report process;
- Evaluation of technologies and system supports necessary to establish the Community Partner Interview demonstration program;
- Recent conversion of more than 19,000 cases to Bay State CAP, further streamlining operations afforded by our Social Security Administration Combined Application Project; and
- Implementing the necessary technology to allow adoption of the telephonic signature option in the fall which will also streamline operations.

State's proposal to address the acute concentration of recertifications and periodic reports

To address the recertifications and periodic report work concentrated in specific periods each year, the state will need flexibility to strategically push out some certification end dates to balance the workload. The state is proposing to only move end dates, as necessary, to months with fewer scheduled recertifications, and to allow periodic reporting to balance out the number of interviews each month. The state recognizes the complexity and nuanced nature of this approach and wishes to work closely with the regional office on its implementation.

To address this problem the state proposes the following;

- leveraging the months with smaller numbers of recertifications and periodic reports due;
- modifying certification periods to establish a reasonable balance, considerations include;
 - o identifying case types for which the risk of pushing out certification end dates is minimal
 - o identifying cases for which an application or recertification has been completed within the past year (or within two years for ESAP cases)
 - o Additional factors to be considered include but are not limited to: Stability of benefit over multiple recertifications, source(s) of income verifiable through databases and/or households with the minimum benefit;
- broadened use of periodic reporting to contact households in a streamlined way; and
- pushing out recerts for six months for a low risk subset of cases and using a periodic report at month 12.