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Contact: Celia Hagert, hagert@cppp.org

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NEW FOOD STAMP RULES TAKE EFFECT

Higher vehicle and resource limits, finger imaging exemptions improve program access

At its December meeting, the Texas Board of Human Services approved final Food Stamp rules that 1) raise the vehicle limit on one car from \$4,650 to \$15,000, 2) exempt all other NON-liquid resources, and 3) establish a higher resource limit of \$5,000 for liquid resources (i.e., bank accounts). The new standards apply to all applications completed after February 15. Exemptions from the finger imaging requirement for certain seniors and persons with disabilities are also now in effect. This Policy Page explains the changes and contains links to education materials that can be used by service providers and community-based organizations to publicize the new rules to clients.

NEW FOOD STAMP RESOURCE TEST

The new Food Stamp resource test will disregard all *non-liquid* resources (i.e., stocks, property) owned by the applicant. The only exception to this is excess vehicle value (see below). Applicants will be allowed to have up to \$5,000 in *liquid* resources (i.e., money in savings or checking accounts). Under the old policy, families could not have more than \$2,000 in combined liquid and non-liquid resources (\$3,000 if any family member is age 60 or older).

Example 3: A family applying for Food Stamps owns two cars and has \$2,000 in the bank. The first car is worth \$16,000, and the second vehicle is worth \$7,000. For the first car, \$1,000—the excess value above the allowed \$15,000—is counted. For the second car, \$2,350—the excess value above the allowed \$4,650—is counted. The family does NOT qualify for Food Stamps because its total countable resources are \$5,350 (\$3,350 in excess car value plus \$2,000 in the bank) and exceed the \$5,000 limit.

NEW FOOD STAMP VEHICLE LIMIT

Under the new rules, \$15,000 of the fair market value of the applicant's first car will be exempted. Any additional value will be counted toward the \$5,000 resource limit. If an applicant owns more than one car, then \$4,650 of the fair market value of each additional vehicle is excluded, with any additional value counted toward the \$5,000 limit. The old policy on cars exempted \$4,650 of each car's fair market value. Some examples to illustrate these policies follow:

Example 1: A family applying for Food Stamps owns two cars and has \$1,000 in a checking account. The first car is worth \$16,500, and the second car is worth \$6,650. For the first car, \$1,500—the excess value above the allowed \$15,000—is counted. For the second car, \$2,000—the excess value above the allowed \$4,650—is counted. The family qualifies for Food Stamps with total countable resources of \$4,500 (\$3,500 in excess car value plus \$1,000 in the bank).

Example 2: A family applying for Food Stamps owns three cars, has \$2,000 in a savings account for a child's education, and \$5,000 in an IRA. The first car is worth \$6,000, the second vehicle is worth \$5,000, and the third car is worth \$4,000. The first car is exempted because its value is under the allowed \$15,000. For the second car, \$350—the excess value above \$4,650—is counted. The third car is exempted because its value is under \$4,650. The IRA is disregarded because it is a non-liquid resource. The family qualifies for Food Stamps with total countable resources of \$2,350 (\$350 in excess car value plus \$2,000 in the bank).

FINGER IMAGING EXEMPTIONS

Under current policy, adult applicants for Food Stamps are electronically finger imaged as a condition of receiving benefits. Under the new rules, seniors (persons age 60+) and persons with disabilities may request an exemption from this requirement if it poses an "undue burden." **For example:** Mom goes to the Food Stamp office to apply for benefits on behalf of her mother, age 62, and two children, both under 18. In this case, the grandmother may request an exemption from the finger imaging requirement because she is over 60 and cannot make it to the Food Stamp office. In the case of disability, the rules define an undue burden as a physical, mental, emotional, or age-related condition. If a physical or mental disability is not obvious, DHS will require proof of disability in writing from a medical professional. In addition, under current rules, if an applicant requests and is granted a phone interview in place of an office interview, then he or she is automatically exempted from the finger imaging requirement, regardless of age or disability.

CLIENT EDUCATION EFFORT

As with all policy changes, it can take a while to get the word out to clients that the rules have changed. It will be particularly hard in this case for families who have recently been denied Food Stamps once because of their car or other resources. To assist in publicizing the new rules, we have

developed education materials in English and Spanish to help providers and clients understand the changes. These flyers can be downloaded at

www.cppp.org/products/alertsflyers/foodflyers/Vehicleflyer02.pdf and

www.cppp.org/products/alertsflyers/foodflyers/spanVehicleflyer02.pdf . If you do not have access to the Internet, please call Celia Hagert at 512-320-0222 and she will send you copies of the flyers.

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