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Food assistance work requirements for able-bodied adults reinstated in four counties; Kent, Oakland, Ottawa, Washtenaw affected

LANSING, Mich. – Able-bodied adults without dependents in four Michigan counties will be required by the federal government to meet work requirements that have been waived for more than a decade to continue receiving food assistance benefits.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services this week is notifying approximately 14,000 people in Kent, Oakland, Ottawa and Washtenaw counties of the change, which is effective Jan. 1.

Able-bodied adults without dependents in those four counties will have a three-month federal time limit for receiving food assistance benefits without meeting the reinstated work requirements.

Michigan began receiving a waiver from the requirements in 2002 due to high unemployment. The significant reduction in the state's jobless rate over the last several years means the state is no longer eligible.

The four counties are being phased out first because of their lower unemployment rates. MDHHS expects the waiver to be phased out statewide by October 2018 or sooner.

Able-bodied adults are recipients ages 18 to 49 who do not have a disability that prevents them from working or meet other federal criteria that exempts them from requirements. They can meet the reinstated work requirements to receive food assistance by:

- Working an average of 20 hours per week each month in unsubsidized employment.
- Participating for an average of 20 hours per week each month in an approved employment and training program.
- Participating in community service by volunteering at a nonprofit organization.

"Michigan's improved economy under the leadership of Gov. Rick Snyder creates greater opportunities for the state's residents to find jobs and achieve self-sufficiency," said MDHHS Director Nick Lyon.

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“MDHHS and our partners at the Michigan Talent Investment Agency and Michigan Works! Agencies are prepared to assist people affected by these reinstated requirements so they can continue on their journey toward self-sufficiency.”

The federal government determines work requirements and other eligibility criteria for individuals to be eligible to receive food assistance under the U.S. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. MDHHS administers federal food assistance benefits through the state’s Food Assistance Program.

Phasing out these work requirements goes along with the MDHHS goal of assisting Michiganders in finding employment to achieve self-sufficiency, end generational poverty and realize their dreams.

MDHHS this week is sending notices to able-bodied adults without dependents in the four counties notifying them of the upcoming change.

MDHHS and its partners at Michigan Works! Agencies and the Michigan Talent Investment Agency will provide resources – such as approved training programs – to help affected residents meet work requirements.

Rolling out the waiver changes in phases allows MDHHS and its partners to implement changes on a smaller level, so the department can evaluate the actions taken and make improvements before statewide implementation. In addition, this provides an opportunity to properly train staff to prepare them for the changes in order to provide effective and positive customer service.

Some federal exemptions to the reinstated work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents will remain. They include exemptions for individuals who are physically or mentally unable to work for 20 hours, are pregnant or care for a child under age 6 or someone who is incapacitated.

Able-bodied adults without dependents can call their MDHHS case specialist with questions or visit www.michigan.gov/FoodAssistance for more information on the work requirements, exemptions and other information.

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