



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance

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Online Guide Transmittal 2023-59
August 16, 2023

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

From:  **Sarah Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Change Management**

Re: SNAP: Preparing for Return of ABAWD Work Rules (Phase One)

Overview

Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the Able-bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWD) Work Rules were suspended on April 1, 2020. Clients who would have otherwise been required to meet the rules were given the exemption: ABAWD Work Rules Suspended (COVID-19). With the end of the public health emergency, **ABAWD Work Rules are no longer suspended.** The temporary exemption ABAWD Work Rules Suspended (COVID-19) is being removed from BEACON as an exemption. The anticipated effective date for system enhancements is August 18, 2023.

DTA recently received waiver approval from Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to allow residents of a waived area not meeting any other exemptions to be exempt from the ABAWD work rules. This waiver includes 13 counties and 9 cities and towns in Massachusetts with high unemployment rates. BEACON will apply Resident of a Waived Area as an exemption to household members not meeting other exemptions and are residing in a waived area.

**Overview
(Continued)**

Additionally, the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 introduces three new ABAWD exemption reasons:

- Homeless individual;
- A veteran; and
- Individual who was in foster care when they turned 18 and who is currently age 24 or younger.

The rules for applying these new exemptions, as well as the other existing exemptions, are detailed in the Online Guide page: ABAWD Work Rules Exemptions.

At this time no individual will be subject to the ABAWD Work Rules (time limited benefits). However, when staff are interviewing clients, they must still screen for ABAWD exemptions and enter the exemption into BEACON.

Many exemptions are verified through information provided by the client or known to DTA through data sources. For example: under age 18 or age 50 or over; working 30 hours a week; and UC recipient. Exemptions may also be self-declared until additional guidance is provided. For example, Pregnant, Veteran, and Homeless. No VC-1 should be sent requesting verification of an exemption. For individuals that do not meet one of the exemptions, including the waived area exemption, they will receive a Discretionary Exemption (formerly known as 15% Exemption). The Discretionary Exemption cannot be applied by local office staff and will be automatically applied in BEACON for existing cases and upon wrap up for new cases until further notice.

The Department is reinstating ABAWD Work Rules in a phased approach. For this initial phase, the changes include:

- Updates to the list of counties, cities and towns that qualify as a waived area.
 - Relabeling various ABAWD Required Status Reason dropdown options (i.e., the ABAWD WR exemption reasons) in the Work Requirements – FS page.
 - Fixing various defects in the ABAWD Clock page; see ABAWD Clock Page Fix section for more information.
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**Overview
(Continued)**

- The addition of Veteran, Foster Care, and Homeless exemption reasons to the Work Requirements – FS page.
 - Changing the hierarchy order in which BEACON applies exemptions and how they appear in the Work Requirements-FS page.
 - The removal of the BEACON Work Requirements Screening page (due to the new homeless exemption, which will now be applied when the Homeless Indicator is selected).
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Purpose

The purpose of this Online Guide Transmittal is to advise staff about the resumption of the ABAWD Work Rules, the associated system changes, and the corresponding updates to the Online Guide.

**ABAWD Clock
Page Fix**

The 36-month clock that began on January 1, 2018, expired on December 31, 2020. Due to a system defect, however, BEACON failed to automatically enter the new 36-month clock in the Time Limits and ABAWD Clock pages. This caused BEACON to continue counting non-compliance strikes against SNAP applicants who incurred the strikes during the previous 36-month clock and filed a SNAP application after December 31, 2020.

To resolve this issue, the following updates are being implemented:

- The new 36-month clock now displays in the Time Limits and ABAWD Clock page.
 - For new applications in which a household member previously received benefits during a prior 36-month clock, BEACON will set the ABAWD Clock page to the current 36-month clock while the application is in a pending status.
 - All non-compliance strikes that staff had manually removed as a workaround to approve certain ABAWDs who applied after 12/31/2020 have been restored. They can be viewed in the ABAWD Clock page by selecting the previous 36-month clock in the Period dropdown.
 - BEACON will properly categorize existing strikes based on the 36-month clock that truly applies to them.
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**Revised Online
Guide Pages**

Topic: SNAP
Book: Work Requirements
Chapter: ABAWD Work Rules
Page: ABAWD Work Rules Exemptions (formerly
“ABAWD Work Program Exemptions”)

Topic: SNAP
Book: Work Requirements
Chapter: ABAWD Work Rules
Page: Waived Areas

Questions

If you have any policy or procedural questions, after conferring with the appropriate TAO personnel, please have your Systems Information Specialists or TAO management email them to [DTA.Procedural Issues](#).

Systems issues should be directed to the Systems Support Help Desk.
