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Department of Transitional Assistance

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Online Guide Transmittal 2024-36
July 1, 2024

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

From:  Sarah Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Local Implementation and Special Populations

Re: SNAP: Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWD) Work Rules Updates

Overview

Due to the Public Health Emergency (PHE) related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ABAWD Work Rules were suspended. Last summer, following the end of the PHE, the Department was required to resume ABAWD Work Rules and time limits.

The Department developed a thoughtful phased plan to come into compliance with Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) requirements. This plan included making system enhancements, and issuing procedural guidance to prevent SNAP recipients who are unable to meet ABAWD Work Rule requirements from losing nutritional support. During this time, DTA elected to apply discretionary exemptions to any ABAWD who did not qualify for an exemption. At that time, staff were advised to screen clients for exemptions in preparation for the return of ABAWD Work Rules and time limited SNAP benefits (see OLG T [2023-59](#)).

Effective July 1, 2024, the Department has implemented system enhancements to reflect the approval for a new geographic waiver. This new geographic waiver is **limited** to five counties and certain cities and towns. With the significant decrease in the geographic waived areas, the Department anticipates an increase in the utilization of discretionary exemptions and **is at risk of exhausting discretionary exemptions prematurely**.

**Overview
(Continued)**

To ensure DTA minimizes the use of discretionary exemptions, **it is crucial that staff screen all clients and apply ABAWD exemptions at every reporting period even if the interview is waived** (i.e., application, recertification, and Interim Report).

In addition, clients who are age 50, 51, or 52 are no longer exempt from the ABAWD Work Rules per the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023. System enhancements have been implemented to adjust the age exemption to age 53 or over.

Staff can anticipate seeing all the related system enhancements in BEACON on **July 2, 2024**.

Purpose

The purpose of this Online Guide Transmittal is to:

- advise staff of the **importance of screening** SNAP recipients for Work Rules exemptions (at reporting periods) and enter them appropriately in BEACON;
 - inform staff of the updates to the new waived areas and the increase of the age-limit to 53;
 - advise staff of the corresponding updates to BEACON and the Online Guide; and
 - advise staff that language changes were made on corresponding pages to reflect ABAWD Work Rules (WR) along with the correct use of pronouns.
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Screening for Exemptions

Since the Department has a limited supply of discretionary exemptions staff must screen for ABAWD Work Rules exemptions if the client is:

- a new applicant, **or**
- at recertification or Interim Report, **and** is listed as being **exempt due to Discretionary Exemption**.

BEACON will assign certain exemptions based on data recorded in the electronic case folder (ECF), such as exemptions related to age, meeting TAFDC/EADC requirements, and federally certified as disabled.

It is important to update corresponding BEACON pages to capture certain exemptions such as the homeless indicator on the address page and US Military Service (prior or retired) for Veterans.

Screening for Exemptions (Continued)

In addition, [Attachment A: ABAWD Work Rules Exemption Screening Questions](#) has been included on the last page of this Transmittal to assist staff with screening a SNAP recipient that does not have an exemption assigned based on data known to BEACON. The attachment can be printed and used as a quick reference for screening purposes.

Update to the Age Exemption in BEACON

To coincide with the changes to the upper age exemption that went into effect, the ABAWD Required status reason in the Work Requirements-FS page will change from “Under Age 18 or age 50 or over” to “**Under Age 18 or age 53 or over.**”

This change will go into effect on July 1, 2024 and be viewable in BEACON July 2, 2024. This exemption will be automatically applied based on the recorded age of the client.

It is important to note that if a client previously met the age exemption due to being age 50 or older, the history tab will still reflect the new exemption language, “**Under Age 18 or age 53 or over.**”

Update to the Geographic Waiver

With the approval of the new geographic waiver, BEACON will be updated to automatically change the ABAWD Required status reason in the Work Requirements-FS page to “Resident of a Waived Area” for any client whose current residence (as recorded in the Address page) is in a waived area and no other exemption is entered.

Concurrently, BEACON will also remove this exemption for any client who is currently using this exemption but no longer resides in a waived area (based on the information in the Address page). If no other exemption applies, BEACON will apply the discretionary exemption.

The new waived areas are detailed in the Online Guide page: [Waived Areas](#).

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

Topic: SNAP
Book: Work Requirements
Chapter: ABAWD Work Rules
Page: ABAWD Work Rules Exemptions

**Revised Online
Guide Pages
(Continued)**

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

Topic: SNAP
Book: Work Requirements
Chapter: ABAWD Work Rules
Page: ABAWD Work Rules Q & A

**Obsoleted
Online Guide
Pages**

Topic: SNAP
Book: Work Requirements
Chapter: ABAWD Work Rules
Page: Request for ABAWD Work Program Exemption
Forms

Topic: SNAP
Book: Work Requirements
Chapter: ABAWD Work Rules
Page: SNAP Work Requirement Medical Report Form

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.ProceduralIssues@massmail.state.ma.us.

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



ABAWD Work Rules Exemption Screening Questions

Ask these questions if BEACON does not automatically exempt a client from the ABAWD Work Rules based on recorded case information (such as age, residing with person under 18, etc.) If a client provides a **Yes** answer to any of the following, take a telephonic self-declaration, enter the associated exemption reason on the Work Requirements-FS page in BEACON, and if applicable complete data entry on the corresponding BEACON page.

<p style="text-align: center;">Screening Questions</p> <p>Ask questions in the order provided below. Once the client provides a Yes response you can stop screening and follow the instructions in the column to the right.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Exemptions and Corresponding BEACON Page</p> <p>For a Yes response go to the Work Requirements – FS page in BEACON and select the identified exemption in the Required Status Reason Field.</p> <p>If applicable go to the corresponding BEACON page and complete.</p>
<p>Did the ABAWD serve in any branch of the US armed services (including the Reserves) regardless of how they were discharged?</p>	<p>Required Status Reason: Veteran</p> <p>BEACON Page to Complete: US Military Service</p>
<p>Is the ABAWD age 24 or younger, and was in state foster care on or after their 18th birthday?</p>	<p>Required Status Reason: Foster Care</p>
<p>Is the ABAWD pregnant? If yes, what is the due date?</p>	<p>Required Status Reason: Pregnant</p> <p>BEACON Page to Complete: Pregnancy</p>
<p>Is the ABAWD enrolled at least half-time in a school, training program, or college?</p>	<p>Required Status Reason: Student</p> <p>BEACON Page to Complete: Education</p> <p>Note: You must enter the correct graduation date for the client in the Education page, as this will determine the end date for the student exemption.</p>
<p>Is the ABAWD in the Refugee Training Program?</p>	<p>Required Status Reason: Refugee Training Program Participant</p> <p>Note: If there is a known end date enter the Anticipated End Date in the Work Requirements – FS page, as this will determine the end date for the Refugee Training Program Participant exemption.</p>

<p>Is the ABAWD caring for a disabled adult or child under 6 who is not in the household?</p>	<p>Required Status Reason: Caretaker</p> <p>Note: If there is a known end date enter the Anticipated End Date in the Work Requirements – FS page, as this will determine the end date for the Caretaker exemption.</p>
<p>Is the ABAWD in a substance abuse treatment program?</p>	<p>Required Status Reason: Substance Abuse Treatment</p> <p>Note: If there is a known end date enter the Anticipated End Date in the Work Requirements – FS page, as this will determine the end date for the Substance Abuse Treatment exemption.</p>
<p>Is the ABAWD experiencing physical or mental barriers preventing them from working 20 or more hours per week (barrier may be observable)?</p>	<p>Required Status Reason: Unable to Work – Illness or Temporary Disability</p> <p>Note: If there is a known end date enter the Anticipated End Date in the Work Requirements – FS page, as this will determine the end date for the Unable to Work – Illness of Temporary Disability exemption.</p>

Important: If the client does not meet any ABAWD exemptions after screening, you must code the client as ABAWD Work Program Required Yes in the Work Requirements page. BEACON will then apply a discretionary exemption for the client.