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NEWS

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Food Stamp Eligibility Expanded for Families With Child Care Costs
Thousands More Will Receive Nutritional Assistance

Thousands of working families with significant child care costs may now qualify for nutritional benefits for the first time, due to an expansion of eligibility for the Food Stamp program, the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) announced today.

As of March 1, OTDA raised the income eligibility level for working families with significant child and dependent care expenses from 130 percent of the federal poverty level to 200 percent. OTDA Commissioner David A. Hansell, along with Senator Velmanette Montgomery and Senator Daniel Squadron, made the announcement today at the Albany Community Action Partnership's (ACAP) Early Learning and Head Start Center in Albany.

“By making this change, we will enable thousands of hard-working families to receive this vital support to help put food on their tables, while freeing up some of their hard-earned income for other family needs,” Commissioner Hansell said. “We remain committed to Governor Paterson’s goal of enhancing the economic security of all New Yorkers, especially in these challenging times.”

A provision in the federal Farm Bill last year removed a cap on out-of-pocket child and dependent care deductions for households receiving Food Stamps. Previously, families were limited to a maximum dependent care deduction of \$175-\$200 per month for each child, a limit not reflective of the actual cost of quality child care.

For example, a family of three with earned income of \$2,640 per month (180 percent of poverty) paying more than \$446 a month for shelter and out-of-pocket child care costs of \$400 per month would be ineligible for Food Stamps without this change because its income is too high. With this change, this family will now receive \$126 a month in Food Stamp benefits.

Senator Montgomery, Chair of the State Senate Committee on Children and Families, said: “No New Yorker should have to choose between feeding their family and paying for other vital living expenses. That’s why Commissioner Hansell’s work on behalf our most vulnerable citizens is so important. I applaud the Commissioner for raising the income eligibility threshold, which makes it possible for many more working families with significant child care costs to receive food stamps.”

Senator Squadron, Vice Chair of the State Senate Committee on Social Services, said: “This vital change will help thousands of working families purchase food and pay for sufficient child care. We must do everything possible to guarantee that families are able to draw on the Food Stamp program. I commend Commissioner Hansell, and I look forward to working together to further improve access and service for New York families.”

Assemblyman Keith L.T. Wright, Chairman of the State Assembly Standing Committee on Social Services, said: “Working families are the backbone and the lifeblood of the State of New York. By providing our working families with tangible benefits, such as food stamps and public assistance, we are able to help them transition to a life of economic security. The increase in income eligibility requirements for families with out-of-pocket child care expenses will reap great benefits for New York, bringing more people into the food stamps program and lowering the cost of living for our hardest working residents, working families with children.”

Kathy Cloutier, ACAP’s Executive Director, said: “ACAP is in a unique position to assess the true impact of OTDA’s increased eligibility requirements as we operate 15 child care and Head Start centers as well as certify applications for the Working Families Food Stamp Initiative at our outreach offices. Many of our hard-working families have applied for food stamps and have been denied because their income was too high, and yet they still struggled to feed their families. OTDA’s insightful and timely increase in eligibility and benefits will help offset the burden of child care costs and bring essential nutritional support into more homes in need.”

Carol Saginaw, Executive Director of the New York State Child Care Coordinating Council, said: “This is truly a step forward for New York’s children and their families. The change in this policy means that many low-income working parents will not have to choose between paying for child care and putting food on their family table.”

Linda Bopp, Executive Director of the Nutrition Consortium of New York State, Inc., said: “In this time of overwhelming need, these changes will help New York’s struggling families avoid choosing between caring for loved ones and purchasing food. Working together, with a shared commitment to help hungry New Yorkers, we can increase eligibility and maximize benefits. It’s good for families and it’s good for the State’s economy since all food stamp benefits are 100% federally funded.”

Susan C. Antos, Senior Attorney for the Empire Justice Center, said: “OTDA’s expansion of food stamp eligibility for low income workers with child care expenses will provide significant assistance to families struggling make ends meet. Even with a child care subsidy, a family of three earning \$32,500 per year incurs large co-payments - as high as 17.5% of their income in many counties. This initiative helps assure that children are well fed at home and well cared for while their parents work.”

Karen Schimke, President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, said: “Many families are paying a significant part of their income for child care. This effort will help them to have safe child care and food on the table.”

This is the latest action by OTDA to aggressively expand access to Food Stamps and to maximize benefits. The major steps already taken by OTDA to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program include:

- Eliminating the resource test for nearly all Food Stamp applicants and recipients statewide, expanding eligibility, encouraging savings and supporting economic independence.
- Implementing telephone rather than in-person interviews at recertification for most Food Stamp households. This reduces demands on local social service districts, eases process for participants and increases benefit continuation.

- Making it easier for working families to access these vital nutritional supports by waiving finger-imaging requirements outside New York City and waiving the face-to-face application interview requirement for qualifying households.
- Through the new website – myBenefits.ny.gov – residents of 15 counties can apply for Food Stamps at a location other than a department of social services office and in some cases community-based organizations involved in this effort are bringing the application process to the community – to places that employ workers that could be eligible or to locations that would likely be frequented by those eligible.
- The myBenefits website also allows anyone to pre-screen themselves for Food Stamps, home energy assistance, state and federal tax credits, WIC program, EPIC program, and school breakfast and lunch programs. The site will be expanded this year to include prescreening for Medicaid, Family Health Plus and Child Health Plus and public assistance.
- Providing a minimum HEAP payment to Food Stamp recipients living in subsidized housing and certain group situations, which provides them with the maximum Standard Utility Allowance, thus significantly increasing their food stamp benefits.

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