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State of Wisconsin
Governor Tony Evers



TO: **W-2 Agencies**
RSS-funded Agencies
RMS-administering Clinics

FROM: Margaret McMahon, Director
Bureau of Working Families
Division of Family and Economic Security
Department of Children and Families

BWF OPERATIONS MEMO							
No:	20-11						
DATE:	05/19/2020						
W-2	<input type="checkbox"/>	EA	<input type="checkbox"/>	CF	<input type="checkbox"/>	JAL	<input type="checkbox"/>
RAP	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	TMJ	<input type="checkbox"/>	TJ	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other EP	<input type="checkbox"/>

SUBJECT: COVID-19: Office of Refugee Resettlement Waivers

CROSS REFERENCE: [Office of Refugee Resettlement \(ORR\) Policy Letter 20-04](#)
[BWF Operations Memo 20-09](#)

EFFECTIVE DATE: April 23, 2020

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to communicate a summary of waivers to ORR regulations, which gives the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and its refugee programs' contractors the necessary flexibility to respond to the spread of COVID-19, and its impact on ORR-eligible populations.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 has contributed to a high rate of unemployment and a significantly increased need for services among refugees and other ORR-eligible populations. Due to this impact, ORR issued the [Policy Letter 20-04](#), which detailed the terms of ten waivers, each of which relax various conditions of eligibility and program requirements for Refugee Support Services (RSS), Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), Refugee Medical Screenings (RMS), and ORR discretionary grant programs (Refugee School Impact, Refugee Youth Mentoring, and Services to Older Refugees). Only those waivers that may have an impact on agency operations are summarized below. All waivers will remain in effect through September 30, 2020, unless otherwise specified.

WAIVERS

1. Eligibility Determinations for ORR Benefits and Services

The requirement to provide written declaration and documentation of immigration status is waived. Verbal declarations must be supported with a subsequent written declaration as soon as possible.

2. Refugee Cash Assistance and Conditions for Receipt of RCA

Some income eligibility criteria have been waived. ORR-eligible populations impacted by COVID-19 may receive various forms of emergency cash assistance from federal, state and local governments and non-profit organizations, including certain COVID-19 emergency assistance payments (e.g. 2020 Economic Impact Payments, RSS payments for utilities). Agencies issuing RCA payments should not disregard unemployment insurance (UI) or COVID-19 pandemic unemployment assistance (PUA). Agencies issuing RCA payments may also refer to [BWF Operations Memo 20-09](#) for additional guidance pertaining to income disregards.

Furthermore, the requirement to participate in employment and training services in order to receive an RCA payment is waived for those recipients who do not have access to web-based services.

3. Refugee Support Services Funding for Emergency and Other Assistance

ORR will permit the use of RSS base funding for additional, immediate, and emergency services, such as transitional housing assistance and emergency payments to cover essential services such as utilities and housing, due to income loss from job disruption or loss related to COVID-19. These conditions pertain to funds previously allocated, and do not include the provision of any additional funds, so ORR advises that such waivers are requested strategically and only after any and all other available emergency assistance has been requested. Agencies should first determine that the individuals seeking assistance has already received all available emergency assistance before providing RSS emergency assistance in order to maximize funding and services.

4. Refugee Support Services Extended Eligibility Period

For all ORR-eligible populations, ORR will waive the 60-month eligibility period for RSS. This extended eligibility period is uncapped, but it does not apply to any non-eligible populations, including naturalized citizens.

5. Provision of ORR Funded Services

Agencies should make all efforts to continue services to the degree possible utilizing on-line resources, education and virtual contacts, or other means that are consistent with local public health entities.

6. Refugee Medical Screenings

The goals of medical screenings should be met using creative online solutions that prioritize safety. The 90-day requirement for providing medical screenings is waived, and (per Waiver I) services may be provided with only verbal verification of eligibility.

CARES WORKER WEB (CWW)/CASE FILE CASE NOTES

For any eligibility or program requirement exceptions granted by these waivers, agencies should utilize case comments in CWW to document the reason for the exception. Agencies that use physical case files must document the reason for the exception in case notes.

REPORTS

For any eligibility or program requirement exceptions granted by these waivers, agencies should utilize comments sections in reports submitted to DCF for federal reporting purposes in order to document the reason for the exception.

TRAINING

No additional training will be required; agencies are encouraged to reach out to their DCF contacts in the Refugee Programs Section (RPS) for guidance.

AGENCY ACTION

Agencies should ensure that program applicants and participants are informed of extended eligibility periods and waived program requirements. When enrolling and serving participants, agencies should discuss the finite time period during which these waivers are in effect.

CONTACTS

Questions regarding these waivers should be directed to the RPS team:

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DCF/DFES/BWF/RJ