



TO: **W-2 Agencies  
Training Staff**

FROM: Patara Horn, Director  
Bureau of Working Families  
Division of Family and Economic Security  
Department of Children and Families

**BWF OPERATIONS MEMO**

No: 21-23

DATE: 11/09/2021

W-2 ☒ EA ☒ CF ☐ JAL ☒

RAP ☐ TMJ ☐ TJ ☐ Other EP ☐

**SUBJECT:** *Living Independently through Financial Empowerment Program*

**CROSS REFERENCE:** [W-2 Manual 3.2.9.1](#)  
[EA Manual 3.2.3](#)  
[American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#)

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** November 17, 2021

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this memo is to provide program and policy guidance for the new Living Independently through Financial Empowerment (LIFE) program.

**BACKGROUND**

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 established a new \$1 billion Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund (PEAF) to assist needy families impacted by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. States, the District of Columbia, tribes operating a tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, and all five U.S. territories are eligible to receive funds.

The Administration for Children and Families awarded \$14.5 million of ARPA funding to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) to assist needy families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The economic stress and social isolation brought by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the risk of domestic violence and limited survivors' ability to escape unsafe situations. To support families experiencing crises resulting from domestic violence which may have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, DCF created the LIFE program using these funds.

## ***PROGRAM OVERVIEW***

The LIFE program will provide short-term, monthly cash payments to families, including tribal members, experiencing crises resulting from a domestic violence situation. The program goal is to assist survivors in their efforts to secure safety for themselves and their children. Using existing relationships with 62 local programs and all 11 federally recognized tribes in Wisconsin, local Domestic Violence (DV) agencies will refer domestic violence survivors impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to Wisconsin Works (W-2) agencies, which will administer the program.

Eligible individuals for the LIFE program are:

1. A parent of a minor child or children -OR- currently pregnant;
2. 18 years of age or older;
3. A U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen;
4. A resident of Wisconsin (unless the applicant is a migrant worker);
5. Experiencing domestic violence or the threat of domestic violence, or be fleeing a domestic violence situation; and
6. A recipient of another public benefit at some point in the prior 12 calendar months, or are currently receiving another public benefit -OR- have income at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Approved applicants will receive \$3,500 over three consecutive months: \$1,500 in month one, \$1,000 in month two, and \$1,000 in month three. Payments will be automated and sent through the State of Wisconsin STAR system, mailing a check directly to the applicant if it is safe to do so; otherwise, checks may be sent directly to the W-2 offices where applicants apply.

LIFE payments are designed to meet urgent financial needs such as housing, utility payments, groceries, etc. The following are examples of allowable uses:

- Rent/housing
- Security deposits
- Utility bill
- Groceries
- Phone/Phone card
- Clothing
- Pet care
- Insurance
- Storage space
- Attorney fees
- Toiletries/  
household  
items/diapers

The list above is non-exhaustive; however, funding may not be used for tax credits, child care, transportation, or short-term education and training.

The LIFE program is only available for a limited time until August 31, 2022, when the federal PEA funds for the program will expire. The Bureau of Working Families (BWF) will advise W-2 agencies in subsequent communications of any changes to the program.

Additional program details can be found in the [LIFE Program and Policy Guide](#).

## ***POLICY***

### **LIFE PROGRAM POLICY**

Policy guidance for the LIFE program is described in the [LIFE Program and Policy Guide](#). The most up-to-date version of the guide will be available in a link on the LIFE program website, which will be available at program implementation: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/life>.

#### W-2 AND EA POLICY UPDATE

[W-2 Manual 3.2.9.1](#) has been updated to add benefits funded by PEAFF, including the LIFE program, as disregarded income.

This policy applies to both W-2 and Emergency Assistance (EA), as [EA Manual 3.2.3](#) refers to W-2 policy for disregarded income types.

[See attached updated W-2 Manual 3.2.9.1.](#)

### **WISCONSIN WORK PROGRAMS**

The application process for the LIFE program is completed by processing a Request for Assistance (RFA) in the Wisconsin Work Programs (WWP) system during a face-to-face, virtual, or phone meeting with the applicant. See the [LIFE Program and Policy Guide](#) and the LIFE RFA Processing Desk Aid for more information.

#### WWP SECURITY

All W-2 agency workers that have a “W-2 Case Management FEP” or “W-2 Case Management FEP – Supervisor” role in WWP will have access to create new LIFE RFAs in WWP. All PINs with a LIFE RFA will be confidential PINs and limited to the assigned worker and their supervisor.

W-2 agency workers who do not have either of these roles in WWP and will be creating LIFE RFAs can complete the [WWP Application – User Setup Form \(DCF F-5212-E\)](#). In addition to submitting the completed form to the DCF Service Desk, agencies that request the “W-2 Case Management FEP” role for an individual solely for the purpose of administering the LIFE program must send a list of all workers obtaining the new security role to [DCFDLIFE@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DCFDLIFE@wisconsin.gov).

### **REFERRALS FROM DV AGENCIES AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**

Interested applicants for the LIFE program can contact the W-2 agency directly or can be referred from a DV agency or other organization. W-2 agencies are strongly encouraged to communicate with DV agencies in their area to establish an efficient referral process. For a list of local agencies, visit the [End Abuse WI](#) website.

### **REPORTS**

Reports will be made available in Webl as reporting needs are determined.

## ***TRAINING***

The Partner Training Team (PTT) created a new LIFE RFA Processing Desk Aid that will be available in the PTT Learning Center prior to implementation.

Due to the sensitive nature of working with survivors of domestic violence, refer to [Administrator's Memo 21-10](#) for expectations of W-2 agencies.

The Division of Family and Economic Security is partnering with the Sojourner Family Peace Center to provide a live, virtual training on "Breaking the Cycle: Trauma-Informed Strategies for Working with Survivors of Domestic Violence." The 2.5-hour training will be offered on November 11, 2021, for W-2 agencies. Additional communication including the link to join the training was sent out in a Help Desk email.

For additional information and resources see Chapter 7 and the Appendix of the LIFE Program and Policy Guide.

## ***AGENCY ACTION***

Agencies must:

1. Familiarize staff with the details in this memo and the LIFE Program and Policy Guide;
2. Update any relevant local agency procedures; and
3. Prepare for implementation on November 17, 2021.

## ***ATTACHMENTS***

[Telephonic Signature Script for LIFE](#)  
[LIFE Program and Policy Guide](#)  
[W-2 Manual 3.2.9.1](#)  
[LIFE Notice of Payment Ending form \(DCF-F-5394-E\)](#)  
[LIFE Notice of Eligibility \(DCF-F-5480-E\)](#)  
[Sample of a LIFE Notice of Eligibility generated from WWP](#)

## ***CONTACTS***

For W-2 Policy Questions: [BWF Policy Question SharePoint](#)

For W-2, CARES and WWP Functionality Questions: BWF Work Programs Help Desk  
[BWFworkprogramsHD@wisconsin.gov](mailto:BWFworkprogramsHD@wisconsin.gov)

DCF/DFES/BWF/AP