



CDSS

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**



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June 1, 2010

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-51-10

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
  
ALL FOOD STAMP COORDINATORS

SUBJECT: FOOD STAMP PROGRAM  
WAIVER OF FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

REFERENCE: ALL COUNTY LETTER (ACL) NO. 09-62 FOOD STAMP PROGRAM WAIVER OF FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW

The purpose of this letter is to encourage counties to take advantage of the option of waiving the face-to-face interview for Food Stamp Program applications. This option was originally communicated to counties via ACL # 09-62 dated October 23, 2009. As explained in the referenced ACL, counties now have the option to waive the face-to-face interview at both initial application and recertification for all households. In lieu of the face-to-face interview, a telephone interview can be conducted without the need to document on a case-by-case basis whether a hardship exists as required by Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) Section 63-300.45.

While a significant number of counties have already begun using the waiver, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) strongly encourages all counties to consider implementing the provisions of the waiver for both intake and recertification. The United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has determined that conducting interviews by telephone, rather than face to face, has not adversely affected households, has proven to be a benefit to agency staff, and has not resulted in higher error rates.

CDSS recently conducted a survey to determine how many counties have implemented the provisions of the waiver. As stated above, while many have done so, several counties are still in the process of deciding whether or not to use the waiver. We would like to emphasize that the purpose of the waiver is to both provide administrative relief to counties during this difficult period of diminished resources as well as to mitigate barriers that may prevent households from completing the application process and receiving benefits to which they may be entitled. These barriers include transportation

issues, availability of child care, and the difficulty faced by many working applicants and recipients in coming into a county office during normal working hours.

Recently, the California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) has added a section to their website entitled “**The 411 on Phone Interviews in California.**” This site provides sample documents, frequently asked questions, myths and facts, local actions, and other information regarding telephone interviews. The information provided is based on lessons learned, best practices, and policies and procedures from other counties and states across the country. You can access this link at:

[www.cfpa.net/PhoneInterviewsCalifornia.html](http://www.cfpa.net/PhoneInterviewsCalifornia.html)

As your county develops best practices related to policy and training, and develops any useful materials about phone interviews, we encourage you to share this information with other counties and CDSS. We will be collecting and sharing information on best practices and procedures, questions and answers, helpful links, and more on CDSS’ website in the future.

Again, CDSS encourages counties to implement the provisions of the face-to-face interview waiver at both intake and recertification for all households. As a reminder, a face-to-face interview must still be conducted if the applicant/recipient requests one, or if it is required by another assistance program (such as CalWORKs). A phone interview can greatly benefit working families, as well as all other households, by removing one of the strongest barriers to participation. Those counties that have not yet implemented the waiver are reminded that households must be screened for the need for a face-to-face interview at initial application and recertification in accordance with MPP 63-300.42.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this letter, ACL No. 09-62, or the face-to-face waiver in general, please contact Tracy Ahlenstorf of the Food Stamp Policy Bureau at (916) 657-3283 or [tracy.ahlenstorf@dss.ca.gov](mailto:tracy.ahlenstorf@dss.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By:***

CHRISTINE WEBB-CURTIS  
Food Stamp Branch