

the household, or has made improper use of coupons, may disqualify that authorized representative from participating as an authorized representative in the Food Stamp Program for up to one year. The State agency shall send written notification to the affected household(s) and the authorized representative thirty days prior to the date of disqualification. The notification shall include: The proposed action; the reason for the proposed action; the household's right to request a fair hearing; the telephone number of the office; and, if possible, the name of the person to contact for additional information. This provision is not applicable in the case of drug and alcoholic treatment centers and those group homes which act as authorized representatives for their residents.

(iv) Homeless meal providers, as defined in § 271.2, may not act as authorized representatives for homeless food stamp recipients.

[Amdt. 132, 43 FR 47889, Oct. 17, 1978]

EDITORIAL NOTE: FOR FEDERAL REGISTER citations affecting § 273.1, see the List of CFR Sections Affected, which appears in the Finding Aids section of the printed volume and on GPO Access.

EFFECTIVE DATE NOTE: At 65 FR 70193, Nov. 21, 2000, in § 273.1, paragraph (f) was removed, effective January 20, 2001.

§ 273.2 Application processing.

(a) *General purpose.* The application process includes filing and completing an application form, being interviewed, and having certain information verified. The State agency shall act promptly on all applications and provide food stamp benefits retroactive to the month of application to those households that have completed the application process and have been determined eligible. Expedited service shall be available to households in immediate need. Specific responsibilities of households and State agencies in the application process are detailed below.

(b) *Food Stamp application form.*—(1) *Content.* Each application form shall contain:

(i) In prominent and boldface lettering and understandable terms a statement that the information provided by the applicant in connection

with the application for food stamp benefits will be subject to verification by Federal, State and local officials to determine if such information is factual; that if any information is incorrect, food stamps may be denied to the applicant; and that the applicant may be subject to criminal prosecution for knowingly providing incorrect information;

(ii) In prominent and boldface lettering and understandable terms a description of the civil and criminal provisions and penalties for violations of the Food Stamp Act;

(iii) A statement to be signed by one adult household member which certifies, under penalty of perjury, the truth of the information contained in the application, including the information concerning citizenship and alien status;

(iv) A place on the front page of the application where the applicant can write his/her name, address and signature;

(v) In plain and prominent language on or near the front page of the application, notification of the household's right to immediately file the application as long as it contains the applicant's name and address and the signature of a responsible household member or the household's authorized representative;

(vi) In plain and prominent language on or near the front page of the application, a description of the expedited service provisions described in paragraph (i) of this section; and

(vii) In plain and prominent language on or near the front page of the application, notification that benefits are provided from the date of application.

(2) *Income and eligibility verification system (IEVS).* All applicants for food stamp benefits shall be notified at the time of application and at each recertification through a written statement on or provided with the application form that information available through the State income and eligibility verification (IEVS) will be requested, used and may be verified through collateral contact when discrepancies are found by the State agency, and that such information may affect the household's eligibility and level of benefits. All applicants shall

also be notified on the application form that the alien status of any household member may be subject to verification by INS through the submission of information from the application to INS, and that the submitted information received from INS may affect the household's eligibility and level of benefits.

(3) *Deviations.* All State agencies shall use an application form designed by FNS. FNS may approve a deviation (design/contents) from that form to accommodate the use of a multi-program application form, the requirements of a computer system (including the use of on-line applications), or other exigencies for which the State agency can submit adequate justification, provided the form is brief, understandable to applicants, easy to use, and, for multi-program applications, clear enough to afford applicants the option of answering only those questions relevant to the program or programs for which they are applying. State agencies may request assistance from FNS in the development of a brief, simply-written and readable application, including application forms which cover the Food Stamp Program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program or the Medicaid Program.

(c) *Filing an application—(1) Household's right to file.* Households must file food stamp applications by submitting the forms to the food stamp office either in person, through an authorized representative or by mail. The length of time a State agency has to deliver benefits is calculated from the date the application is filed in the food stamp office designated by the State agency to accept the household's application, except when a resident of a public institution is jointly applying for SSI and food stamps prior to his/her release from an institution in accordance with § 273.1(e)(2). Residents of public institutions who apply for food stamps prior to their release from the institution shall be certified in accordance with § 273.2(g)(1) or § 273.2(i)(3)(i), as appropriate. Each household has the right to file an application form on the same day it contacts the food stamp office during office hours. The household shall be advised that it does not have to be interviewed before filing the application and may file an incomplete

application form as long as the form contains the applicant's name and address, and is signed by a responsible member of the household or the household's authorized representative. State agencies shall document the date the application was filed by recording on the application the date it was received by the food stamp office. When a resident of an institution is jointly applying for SSI and food stamps prior to leaving the institution, the filing date of the application to be recorded by the State agency on the food stamp application is the date of release of the applicant from the institution.

(2) *Contacting the food stamp office.* (i) State agencies shall encourage households to file an application form the same day the household or its representative contacts the food stamp office in person or by telephone and expresses interest in obtaining food stamp assistance. If a household contacting the food stamp office by telephone does not wish to come to the appropriate office to file the application that same day and instead prefers receiving an application through the mail, the State agency shall mail an application form to the household on the same day the telephone request is received. An application shall also be mailed on the same day a written request for food assistance is received.

(ii) Where a project area has designated certification offices to serve specific geographic areas, households may contact an office other than the one designated to service the area in which they reside. When a household contacts the wrong certification office within a project area in person or by telephone, the certification office shall, in addition to meeting the requirements in paragraph (c)(2)(i) of this section, give the household the address and telephone number of the appropriate office. The certification office shall also offer to forward the household's application to the appropriate office that same day if the household has completed enough information on the application to file. The household shall be informed that its application will not be considered filed and the processing standards shall not begin until the application is received by the appropriate office. If the household has

mailed its application to the wrong office within a project area, the certification office shall mail the application to the appropriate office on the same day.

(iii) In State agencies that elect to have Statewide residency, as provided in §273.3, the application processing timeframes begin when the application is filed in any food stamp office in the State.

(3) *Availability of the application form.* The State agency shall make application forms readily accessible to potentially eligible households. The State agency shall also provide an application form to anyone who requests the form.

(4) *Notice of right to file.* The State agency shall post signs in the certification office which explain the application processing standards and the right to file an application on the day of initial contact. The State agency shall include similar information about same day filing on the application form.

(5) *Notice of Required Verification.* The State agency shall provide each household at the time of application for certification and recertification with a notice that informs the household of the verification requirements the household must meet as part of the application process. The notice shall also inform the household of the State agency's responsibility to assist the household in obtaining required verification provided the household is cooperating with the State agency as specified in (d)(1) of this section. The notice shall be written in clear and simple language and shall meet the bilingual requirements designated in §272.4(b) of this chapter. At a minimum, the notice shall contain examples of the types of documents the household should provide and explain the period of time the documents should cover.

(6) *Withdrawing application.* The household may voluntarily withdraw its application at any time prior to the determination of eligibility. The State agency shall document in the case file the reason for withdrawal, if any was stated by the household, and that contact was made with the household to confirm the withdrawal. The household shall be advised of its right to reapply

at any time subsequent to a withdrawal.

(d) *Household cooperation.* (1) To determine eligibility, the application form must be completed and signed, the household or its authorized representative must be interviewed, and certain information on the application must be verified. If the household refuses to cooperate with the State agency in completing this process, the application shall be denied at the time of refusal. For a determination of refusal to be made, the household must be able to cooperate, but clearly demonstrate that it will not take actions that it can take and that are required to complete the application process. For example, to be denied for refusal to cooperate, a household must refuse to be interviewed not merely failing to appear for the interview. If there is any question as to whether the household has merely failed to cooperate, as opposed to refused to cooperate, the household shall not be denied. The household shall also be determined ineligible if it refuses to cooperate in any subsequent review of its eligibility, including reviews generated by reported changes and applications for recertification. Once denied or terminated for refusal to cooperate, the household may reapply but shall not be determined eligible until it cooperates with the State agency. The State agency shall not determine the household to be ineligible when a person outside of the household fails to cooperate with a request for verification. The State agency shall not consider individuals identified as nonhousehold members under §273.1(b)(2) as individuals outside the household.

(2) *Cooperation with QC Reviewer.* In addition, the household shall be determined ineligible if it refuses to cooperate in any subsequent review of its eligibility as a part of a quality control review. If a household is terminated for refusal to cooperate with a quality control reviewer, in accordance with §275.3(c)(5) or §275.12(g)(1)(ii), the household may reapply, but shall not be determined eligible until it cooperates with the quality control reviewer. If a household terminated for refusal to cooperate with a State quality control reviewer reapplies after 95 days from the end of the annual review period,

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the household shall not be determined ineligible for its refusal to cooperate with a State quality control reviewer during the completed review period, but must provide verification in accordance with § 273.2(f)(1)(ix). If a household terminated for refusal to cooperate with a Federal quality control reviewer reapplies after seven months from the end of the annual review period, the household shall not be determined ineligible for its refusal to cooperate with a Federal quality control reviewer during the completed review period, but must provide verification in accordance with § 273.2(f)(1)(ix).

(e) *Interviews.* (1) All applicant households, including those submitting applications by mail, shall have face-to-face interviews in a food stamp office or other certification site with a qualified eligibility worker prior to initial certification and all recertifications. The individual interviewed may be the head of household, spouse, any other responsible member of the household, or an authorized representative. The applicant may bring any person he or she chooses to the interview. The interviewer shall not simply review the information that appears on the application, but shall explore and resolve with the household unclear and incomplete information. Households shall be advised of their rights and responsibilities during the interview, including the appropriate application processing standard and the households' responsibility to report changes. The interview shall be conducted as an official and confidential discussion of household circumstances. The applicant's right to privacy shall be protected during the interview. Facilities shall be adequate to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of the interview.

(2) The office interview shall be waived if requested by any household which is unable to appoint an authorized representative and which has no household members able to come to the food stamp office because they are elderly or disabled (as defined in § 271.2). The office interview shall also be waived if requested by any household which is unable to appoint an authorized representative and lives in a location which is not served by a certification office. The State agency shall

waive the office interview on a case-by-case basis for any household which is unable to appoint an authorized representative and which has no household members able to come to the food stamp office because of transportation difficulties or similar hardships which the State agency determines warrants a waiver of the office interview. These hardship conditions include, but are not limited to: Illness, care of a household member, hardships due to residency in a rural area, prolonged severe weather, or work or training hours which prevent the household from participating in an in-office interview. The State agency shall determine if the transportation difficulty or hardship reported by a household warrants a waiver of the office interview and shall document in the case file why a request for a waiver was granted or denied.

(i) The State agency has the option of conducting a telephone interview or a home visit for those households for whom the office interview is waived. Home visits shall be used only if the time of the visit is scheduled in advance with the household.

(ii) Waiver of the face-to-face interview does not exempt the household from the verification requirements, although special procedures may be used to permit the household to provide verification and thus obtain its benefits in a timely manner, such as substituting a collateral contact in cases where documentary verification would normally be provided.

(iii) Waiver of the face-to-face interview shall not affect the length of the household's certification period.

(3) The State agency shall schedule all interviews as promptly as possible to insure eligible households receive an opportunity to participate within 30 days after the application is filed. If a household fails to appear for the first interview, the State agency shall attempt to schedule another interview. The interview shall be rescheduled by the State agency without requiring the household to provide good cause for failing to appear. However, if the household does not appear for the rescheduled interview, the State agency need not initiate action to schedule any further interviews unless the

household requests that another interview be scheduled.

(f) *Verification.* Verification is the use of third-party information or documentation to establish the accuracy of statements on the application.

(1) *Mandatory verification.* State agencies shall verify the following information prior to certification for households initially applying:

(i) *Gross none exempt income.* Gross non-exempt income shall be verified for all households prior to certification. However, where all attempts to verify the income have been unsuccessful because the person or organization providing the income has failed to cooperate with the household and the State agency, and all other sources of verification are unavailable, the eligibility worker shall determine an amount to be used for certification purposes based on the best available information.

(ii) *Alien status.* (A) Based on the application, the State agency shall determine if members identified as aliens are eligible aliens, as defined in § 273.4 (a)(2) through (a)(9), by requiring that the household present verification for each alien member.

(B) Aliens in the categories specified in § 273.4(a) (2) and (3) shall present either an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Form I-151 or i-551, or such other documents which identify the aliens' immigration status and which the State agency determines are reasonable of the aliens' immigration status.

(C) Aliens in the categories specified in § 273.4 (a)(4) through (a)(7) shall present an INS Form I-94: *Arrival-Departure Record* or other documents which identify the aliens' immigration status and which the State agency determines are reasonable evidence of the aliens' immigration status. The State agency shall accept the INS Form I-94 as verification of eligible alien status only if the form is annotated with section 207, 208, 212(d)(5) or 243(h) of the Immigration and Nationality Act or if the form is annotated with any one of the following terms or a combination of the following terms: Refugee, parolee, paroled, or asylum. An INS Form I-94 annotated with any one of the letters (A) through (L) shall be considered verification of ineligible alien status

unless the alien can provide other documentation from INS which indicates that the alien is eligible. If the INS Form I-94 does not bear any of the above annotations and the alien has no other verification of alien classification in his or her possession, the State agency shall advise the alien to submit Form G-641, *Application for Verification of Information from Immigration and Naturalization Service Records*, to INS. State agencies shall accept this form when presented by the alien and properly annotated at the bottom by an INS representative as evidence of lawful admission for permanent residence or parole for humanitarian reasons. The alien shall also be advised that classification under section 207, 208, 212(d)(5), or 243(h) of the Immigration and Nationality Act shall result in eligible status; that the alien may be eligible if acceptable verification is obtained; and that the alien may contact INS, as stated previously, or otherwise obtain the necessary verification or, if the alien wishes and signs a written consent, that the State agency will contact INS to obtain clarification of the alien's status. If the alien does not wish to contact INS, the household shall be given the option of withdrawing its application or participating without that member.

(D) Aliens in the categories specified in § 273.4(a)(8) and (a)(9) shall present documentation such as, but not limited to, a letter, notice of eligibility, or identification card which clearly identifies the alien has been granted legal status in one of those categories.

(E) The State agency is responsible to offer to contact INS when the alien has an INS document that does not clearly indicate eligible or ineligible alien status. The State agency does not need to offer to contact INS on the alien's behalf when the alien does not provide an INS document. However, when State agencies accept non-INS documentation determined to be reasonable evidence of the alien's immigration status as specified in paragraphs (f)(1)(ii) (B), (C), and (D) of this section, the State agency shall photocopy the document and transmit the photocopy to INS for verification. Pending such verification, the State agency shall not delay, deny, reduce or

terminate the individual's eligibility for benefits on the basis of the individual's immigration status. The State agency does not need to receive the alien applicant's written consent in order to transmit the photocopy to INS.

(F) The State agency shall provide alien applicants with a reasonable opportunity to submit acceptable documentation of their eligible alien status as of the 30th day following the date of application. A reasonable opportunity shall be at least 10 days from the date of the State agency's request for an acceptable document. When the State agency accepts non-INS documentation as specified in paragraphs (f)(1)(ii) (B), (C), and (D) of this section and fails to provide an alien applicant with a reasonable opportunity as of the 30th day following the date of application, the State agency shall provide the household with benefits no later than 30 days following the date of application *Provided* the household is otherwise eligible.

(G) Except as specified in paragraphs (f)(1)(ii)(F) and (f)(10)(i) of this section, the alien applicant whose status is questionable shall be ineligible until the alien provides acceptable documentation. The income and resources of the ineligible alien shall be treated in the same manner as a disqualified individual set forth in §273.11(c), and shall be considered available in determining the eligibility of any remaining members.

(iii) *Utility expenses.* The State agency shall verify a household's utility expenses if the household wishes to claim expenses in excess of the State agency's utility standard and the expense would actually result in a deduction. If the household's actual utility expenses cannot be verified before the 30 days allowed to process the application expire, the State agency shall use the standard utility allowance, provided the household is entitled to use the standard as specified in §273.9(d). If the household wishes to claim expenses for an unoccupied home, the State agency shall verify the household's actual utility expenses for the unoccupied home in every case and shall not use the standard utility allowance.

(iv) *Medical expenses.* The amount of any medical expenses (including the amount of reimbursements) deductible under §273.9(d)(3) shall be verified prior to initial certification. Verification of other factors, such as the allowability of services provided or the eligibility of the person incurring the cost, shall be required if questionable.

(v) *Social security numbers.* The State agency shall verify the social security number(s) (SSN) reported by the household by submitting them to the Social Security Administration (SSA) for verification according to procedures established by SSA. The State agency shall not delay the certification for or issuance of benefits to an otherwise eligible household solely to verify the SSN of a household member. Once an SSN has been verified, the State agency shall make a permanent annotation to its file to prevent the unnecessary reverification of the SSN in the future. The State agency shall accept as verified an SSN which has been verified by another program participating in the IEVS described in §272.8. If an individual is unable to provide an SSN or does not have an SSN, the State agency shall require the individual to submit Form SS-5, Application for a Social Security Number, to the SSA in accordance with procedures in §273.6. A completed SSA Form 2853 shall be considered proof of application for an SSN for a newborn infant.

(vi) *Residency.* The residency requirements of §273.3 shall be verified except in unusual cases (such as homeless households, some migrant farmworker households, or households newly arrived in a project area) where verification of residency cannot reasonably be accomplished. Verification of residency should be accomplished to the extent possible in conjunction with the verification of other information such as, but not limited to, rent and mortgage payments, utility expenses, and identity. If verification cannot be accomplished in conjunction with the verification of other information, then the State agency shall use a collateral contact or other readily available documentary evidence. Documents used to verify other factors of eligibility

should normally suffice to verify residency as well. Any documents or collateral contact which reasonably establish the applicant's residency must be accepted and no requirement for a specific type of verification may be imposed. No durational residency requirement shall be established.

(vii) *Identity*. The identity of the person making application shall be verified. Where an authorized representative applies on behalf of a household, the identity of both the authorized representative and the head of household shall be verified. Identity may be verified through readily available documentary evidence, or if this is unavailable, through a collateral contact. Examples of acceptable documentary evidence which the applicant may provide include, but are not limited to, a driver's license, a work or school ID, an ID for health benefits or for another assistance or social services program, a voter registration card, wage stubs, or a birth certificate. Any documents which reasonably establish the applicant's identity must be accepted, and no requirement for a specific type of document, such as a birth certificate, may be imposed.

(viii) *Disability*. (A) The State agency shall verify disability as defined in § 271.2 as follows:

(1) For individuals to be considered disabled under paragraphs (2), (3) and (4) of the definition, the household shall provide proof that the disabled individual is receiving benefits under titles I, II, X, XIV or XVI of the Social Security Act.

(2) For individuals to be considered disabled under paragraph (6) of the definition, the household must present a statement from the Veterans Administration (VA) which clearly indicates that the disabled individual is receiving VA disability benefits for a service-connected or non-service-connected disability and that the disability is rated as total or paid at the total rate by VA.

(3) For individuals to be considered disabled under paragraphs (7) and (8) of the definition, proof by the household that the disabled individual is receiving VA disability benefits is sufficient verification of disability.

(4) For individuals to be considered disabled under paragraphs (5) and (9) of the definition, the State agency shall use the Social Security Administration's (SSA) most current list of disabilities considered permanent under the Social Security Act for verifying disability. If it is obvious to the caseworker that the individual has one of the listed disabilities, the household shall be considered to have verified disability. If disability is not obvious to the caseworker, the household shall provide a statement from a physician or licensed or certified psychologist certifying that the individual has one of the nonobvious disabilities listed as the means for verifying disability under paragraphs (5) and (9) of the definition.

(5) For individuals to be considered disabled under paragraph (10) of the definition, the household shall provide proof that the individual receives a Railroad Retirement disability annuity from the Railroad Retirement Board *and* has been determined to qualify for Medicare.

(6) For individuals to be considered disabled under paragraph (11) of the definition, the household shall provide proof that the individual receives interim assistance benefits pending the receipt of Supplemental Security Income; or disability-related medical assistance under title XIX of the SSA; or disability-based State general assistance benefits. The State agency shall verify that the eligibility to receive these benefits is based upon disability or blindness criteria which are at least as stringent as those used under title XVI of the Social Security Act.

(B) For disability determinations which must be made relevant to the provisions of § 273.1(a)(2)(ii), the State agency shall use the SSA's most current list of disabilities as the initial step for verifying if an individual has a disability considered permanent under the Social Security Act. However, only those individuals who suffer from one of the disabilities mentioned in the SSA list who are unable to purchase and prepare meals because of such disability shall be considered disabled for the purpose of this provision. If it is

obvious to the caseworker that the individual is unable to purchase and prepare meals because he/she suffers from a severe physical or mental disability, the individual shall be considered disabled for the purpose of the provision even if the disability is not specifically mentioned on the SSA list. If the disability is not obvious to the caseworker, he/she shall verify the disability by requiring a statement from a physician or licensed or certified psychologist certifying that the individual (in the physician's/psychologist's opinion) is unable to purchase and prepare meals because he/she suffers from one of the nonobvious disabilities mentioned in the SSA list or is unable to purchase meals because he/she suffers from some other severe, permanent physical or mental disease or nondisease-related disability. The elderly and disabled individual (or his/her authorized representative) shall be responsible for obtaining the cooperation of the individuals with whom he/she resides in providing the necessary income information about the others to the State agency for purposes of this provision.

(ix) State agencies shall verify all factors of eligibility for households who have been terminated for refusal to cooperate with a State quality control reviewer, and reapply after 95 days from the end of the annual review period. State agencies shall verify all factors of eligibility for households who have been terminated for refusal to cooperate with a Federal quality control reviewer and reapply after seven months from the end of the annual review period.

(x) *Household composition.* State agencies shall verify factors affecting the composition of a household, if questionable. Individuals who claim to be a separate household from those with whom they reside shall be responsible for proving that they are a separate household to the satisfaction of the State agency. Individuals who claim to be a separate household from those with whom they reside based on the various age and disability factors for determining separateness shall be responsible for proving a claim of separateness (at the State agency's re-

quest) in accordance with the provisions of §273.2(f)(1)(viii).

(xi) *Shelter costs for homeless households.* Homeless households claiming shelter expenses greater than the standard estimate of shelter expenses (as defined in §273.9(d)(5)(i)) must provide verification of these shelter expenses. If a homeless household has difficulty in obtaining traditional types of verification of shelter costs, the caseworker shall use prudent judgment in determining if the verification obtained is adequate. For example, if a homeless individual claims to have incurred shelter costs for several nights and the costs are comparable to costs typically incurred by homeless people for shelter, the caseworker may decide to accept this information as adequate information and not require further verification.

(xii) *Students.* If a person claims to be physically or mentally unfit for purposes of the student exemption contained in §273.5(b)(2) and the unfitness is not evident to the State agency, verification may be required. Appropriate verification may consist of receipt of temporary or permanent disability benefits issued by governmental or private sources, or of a statement from a physician or licensed or certified psychologist.

(xiii) *Legal obligation and actual child support payments.* The State agency shall obtain verification of the household's legal obligation to pay child support, the amount of the obligation, and the monthly amount of child support the household actually pays. Documents that are accepted as verification of the household's legal obligation to pay child support shall not be accepted as verification of the household's actual monthly child support payments. State agencies may and are strongly encouraged to obtain information regarding a household member's child support obligation and payments from Child Support Enforcement (CSE) automated data files. The State agency shall give the household an opportunity to resolve any discrepancy between household verification and CSE records in accordance with paragraph (f)(9) of this section.

(2) *Verification of questionable information.* (i) The State agency shall verify,

prior to certification of the household, all other factors of eligibility which the State agency determines are questionable and affect the household's eligibility and benefit level. The State agency shall establish guidelines to be followed in determining what shall be considered questionable information. These guidelines shall not prescribe verification based on race, religion, ethnic background, or national origin. These guidelines shall not target groups such as migrant farmworkers or American Indians for more intensive verification under this provision.

(ii) *Citizenship.* (A) When a household's statement that one or more of its members are U.S. citizens is questionable, the household shall be asked to provide acceptable verification. Acceptable forms of verification include birth certificates, religious records, voter registration cards, certificates of citizenship or naturalization provided by INS, such as identification cards for use of resident citizens in the United States (INS Form I-179 or INS Form I-197) or U.S. passports. Participation in the TANF program shall also be considered acceptable verification if verification of citizenship was obtained for that program. If the above forms of verification cannot be obtained and the household can provide a reasonable explanation as to why verification is not available, the State agency shall accept a signed statement from someone who is a U.S. citizen which declares, under penalty of perjury, that the member in question is a U.S. citizen. The signed statement shall contain a warning of the penalties for helping someone commit fraud, such as: If you intentionally give false information to help this person get food stamps, you may be fined, imprisoned, or both.

(B) The member whose citizenship is in question shall be ineligible to participate until proof of U.S. citizenship is obtained. Until proof of U.S. citizenship is obtained, the member whose citizenship is in question will have his or her income, less a prorata share, and all of his or her resources considered available to any remaining household members as set forth in §273.11(c).

(3) *State agency options.* In addition to the verification required in paragraphs (f)(1) and (f)(2) of this section, the

State agency may elect to mandate verification of any other factor which affects household eligibility or allotment level, including household size where not questionable. Such verification may be required Statewide or throughout a project area, but shall not be imposed on a selective, case-by-case basis on particular households.

(i) The State agency may establish its own standards for the use of verification, provided that, at a minimum, all questionable factors are verified in accordance with paragraph (f)(2) of this section and that such standards do not allow for inadvertent discrimination. For example, no standard may be applied which prescribes variances in verification based on race, religion, ethnic background or national origin, nor may a State standard target groups such as migrant farmworkers or American Indians for more intensive verification than other households. The options specified in this paragraph, shall not apply in those offices of the Social Security Administration (SSA) which, in accordance with paragraph (k) of this section, provide for the food stamp certification of households containing recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and social security benefits. The State agency, however, may negotiate with those SSA offices with regard to mandating verification of these options.

(ii) If a State agency opts to verify a deductible expense and obtaining the verification may delay the household's certification, the State agency shall advise the household that its eligibility and benefit level may be determined without providing a deduction for the claimed but unverified expense. This provision also applies to the allowance of medical expenses as specified in paragraph (f)(1)(iv) of this section. Shelter costs would be computed without including the unverified components. The standard utility allowance shall be used if the household is entitled to claim it and has not verified higher actual costs. If the expense cannot be verified within 30 days of the date of application, the State agency shall determine the household's eligibility and benefit level without providing a deduction of the unverified expense. If the household subsequently

provides the missing verification, the State agency shall redetermine the household's benefits, and provide increased benefits, if any, in accordance with the timeliness standards in § 273.12 on reported changes. If the expense could not be verified within the 30-day processing standard because the State agency failed to allow the household sufficient time, as defined in paragraph (h)(1) of this section, to verify the expense, the household shall be entitled to the restoration of benefits retroactive to the month of application, provided that the missing verification is supplied in accordance with paragraph (h)(3) of this section. If the household would be ineligible unless the expense is allowed, the household's application shall be handled as provided in paragraph (h) of this section.

(4) *Sources of verification*—(i) *Documentary evidence*. State agencies shall use documentary evidence as the primary source of verification for all items except residency and household size. These items may be verified either through readily available documentary evidence or through a collateral contact, without a requirement being imposed that documentary evidence must be the primary source of verification. Documentary evidence consists of a written confirmation of a household's circumstances. Examples of documentary evidence include wage stubs, rent receipts, and utility bills. Although documentary evidence shall be the primary source of verification, acceptable verification shall not be limited to any single type of document and may be obtained through the household or other source. Whenever documentary evidence cannot be obtained or is insufficient to make a firm determination of eligibility or benefit level, the eligibility worker may require collateral contacts or home visits. For example, documentary evidence may be considered insufficient when the household presents pay stubs which do not represent an accurate picture of the household's income (such as out-dated pay stubs) or identification papers that appear to be falsified.

(ii) *Collateral contacts*. A collateral contact is an oral confirmation of a household's circumstances by a person outside of the household. The collat-

eral contact may be made either in person or over the telephone. The State agency may select a collateral contact if the household fails to designate one or designates one which is unacceptable to the State agency. Examples of acceptable collateral contacts may include employers, landlords, social service agencies, migrant service agencies, and neighbors of the household who can be expected to provide accurate third-party verification.

(iii) *Home visits*. Home visits may be used as verification only when documentary evidence is insufficient to make a firm determination of eligibility or benefit level, or cannot be obtained, and the home visit is scheduled in advance with the household.

(iv) *Discrepancies*. Where unverified information from a source other than the household contradicts statements made by the household, the household shall be afforded a reasonable opportunity to resolve the discrepancy prior to a determination of eligibility or benefits. The State agency may, if it chooses, verify the information directly and contact the household only if such direct verification efforts are unsuccessful. If the unverified information is received through the IEVS, as specified in § 272.8, the State agency may obtain verification from a third party as specified in paragraph (f)(9)(v) of this section.

(5) *Responsibility of obtaining verification*. (i) The household has primary responsibility for providing documentary evidence to support statements on the application and to resolve any questionable information. The State agency shall assist the household in obtaining this verification provided the household is cooperating with the State agency as specified under paragraph (d)(1) of this section. Households may supply documentary evidence in person, through the mail, or through an authorized representative. The State agency shall not require the household to present verification in person at the food stamp office. The State agency shall accept any reasonable documentary evidence provided by the household and shall be primarily concerned with how adequately the verification proves the statements on the application.

(ii) Whenever documentary evidence is insufficient to make a firm determination of eligibility or benefit level, or cannot be obtained, the State agency may require a collateral contact or a home visit. The State agency, generally, shall rely on the household to provide the name of any collateral contact. The household may request assistance in designating a collateral contact. The State agency is not required to use a collateral contact designated by the household if the collateral contact cannot be expected to provide an accurate third-party verification. When the collateral contact designated by the household is unacceptable, the State agency shall either designate another collateral contact, ask the household to designate another collateral contact or to provide an alternative form of verification, or substitute a home visit. The State agency is responsible for obtaining verification from acceptable collateral contacts.

(6) *Documentation.* Case files must be documented to support eligibility, ineligibility, and benefit level determinations. Documentation shall be in sufficient detail to permit a reviewer to determine the reasonableness and accuracy of the determination.

(7) *State Data Exchange and Beneficiary Data Exchange.* The State agency may verify SSI benefits through the State Data Exchange (SDX), and Social Security benefit information through the Beneficiary Data Exchange (BENDEX), or through verification provided by the household. The State agency may use SDX and BENDEX data to verify other food stamp eligibility criteria. The State agency may access SDX and BENDEX data without release statements from households, provided the State agency makes the appropriate data request to SSA and executes the necessary data exchange agreements with SSA. The household shall be given an opportunity to verify the information from another source if the SDX or BENDEX information is contradictory to the information provided by the household or is unavailable. Determination of the household's eligibility and benefit level shall not be delayed past the application processing time standards of paragraph (g) of this

section if SDX or BENDEX data is unavailable.

(8) *Verification subsequent to initial certification.* (i) *Recertification.*—(A) At recertification the State agency shall verify a change in income or actual utility expenses if the source has changed or the amount has changed by more than \$25. Previously unreported medical expenses and total recurring medical expenses which have changed by more than \$25 shall also be verified at recertification. The State agency shall not verify income if the source has not changed and if the amount is unchanged or has changed by \$25 or less, unless the information is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated. The State agency shall also not verify total medical expenses, or actual utility expenses claimed by households which are unchanged or have changed by \$25 or less, unless the information is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated. The State agency shall require a household eligible for the child support deduction to verify any changes in the legal obligation to pay child support, the obligated amount, and the amount of legally obligated child support a household member pays to a nonhousehold member. The State agency shall verify reportedly unchanged child support information only if the information is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated.

(B) Newly obtained social security numbers shall be verified at recertification in accordance with verification procedures outlined in § 273.2(f)(1)(v).

(C) Other information which has changed may be verified at recertification. Unchanged information shall not be verified unless the information is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated. Verification under this paragraph shall be subject to the same verification procedures as apply during initial verification.

(ii) *Changes.* Changes reported during the certification period shall be subject to the same verification procedures as apply at initial certification, except that the State agency shall not verify changes in income if the source has not changed and if the amount has changed by \$25 or less, unless the information is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated. The State agency shall also

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not verify total medical expenses or actual utility expenses which are unchanged or have changed by \$25 or less, unless the information is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or outdated.

(9) *Use of IEVS.* (i) The State agency shall use information obtained through the IEVS to verify the eligibility and benefit level of applicant and participating households, in accordance with procedures specified in § 272.8.

(ii) The State agency may access data through the IEVS provided the disclosure safeguards and data exchange agreements required by part 272 are satisfied.

(iii) The State agency shall take action, including proper notices to households, to terminate, deny, or reduce benefits based on information obtained through the IEVS which is considered verified upon receipt. This information is social security and SSI benefit information obtained from SSA, and TANF benefit information and UIB information obtained from the agencies administering those programs. If the State agency has information that the IEVS-obtained information about a particular household is questionable, this information shall be considered unverified upon receipt and the State agency shall take action as specified in paragraph (f)(9)(iv) of this section.

(iv) Except as noted in this paragraph, prior to taking action to terminate, deny, or reduce benefits based on information obtained through the IEVS which is considered unverified upon receipt, State agencies shall independently verify the information. Such unverified information is unearned income information from IRS, wage information from SSA and SWICAs, and questionable IEVS information discussed in paragraph (f)(9)(iii) of this section. Independent verification shall include verification of the amount of the asset or income involved, whether the household actually has or had access to such asset or income such that it would be countable income or resources for food stamp purposes, and the period during which such access occurred. Except with respect to unearned income information from IRS, if a State agency has information which indicates that independent

verification is not needed, such verification is not required.

(v) The State agency shall obtain independent verification of unverified information obtained from IEVS by means of contacting the household and/or the appropriate income, resource or benefit source. If the State agency chooses to contact the household, it must do so in writing, informing the household of the information which it has received, and requesting that the household respond within 10 days. If the household fails to respond in a timely manner, the State agency shall send it a notice of adverse action as specified in § 273.13. The State agency may contact the appropriate source by the means best suited to the situation. When the household or appropriate source provides the independent verification, the State agency shall properly notify the household of the action it intends to take and provide the household with an opportunity to request a fair hearing prior to any adverse action.

(10) *Use of SAVE.* When participating in the INS SAVE Program to verify the validity of documents presented by applicant aliens, State agency's shall use the following procedures:

(i) The State agency shall provide an applicant alien with a reasonable opportunity to submit acceptable documentation of their eligible alien status prior to the 30th day following the date of application. A reasonable opportunity shall be at least 10 days from the date of the State agency's request for an acceptable document. An alien who has been given a reasonable opportunity to submit acceptable documentation and has not done so as of the 30th day following the date of application shall not be certified for benefits until acceptable documentation has been submitted. However, if the 10-day reasonable opportunity period provided by the State agency does not lapse before the 30th day following the date of application, the State agency shall provide the household with benefits no later than 30 days following the date of application *Provided* the household is otherwise eligible.

(ii) The written consent of the alien applicant shall not be required as a

condition for the State agency to contact INS to verify the validity of documentation.

(iii) State agencies which access the ASVI database through an automated access shall also submit INS Form G-845, with an attached photocopy of the alien's document, to INS whenever the initial automated access does not confirm the validity of the alien's documentation or a significant discrepancy exists between the data provided by the ASVI and the information provided by the applicant. Pending such responses from either the ASVI or INS Form G-845, the State agency shall not delay, deny, reduce, or terminate the alien's eligibility for benefits on the basis of the individual's alien status.

(iv) If the State agency determines, after complying with the requirements of this section, that the alien is not in an eligible alien status, the State agency shall take action, including proper notices to the household, to terminate, deny or reduce benefits. The State agency shall provide households the opportunity to request a fair hearing under § 273.15 prior to any adverse action.

(v) The use of SAVE shall be documented in the casefile or other agency records. When the State agency is waiting for a response from SAVE, agency records shall contain either a notation showing the date of the State agency's transmission or a copy of the INS Form G-845 sent to INS. Once the SAVE response is received, agency records shall show documentation of the ASVI Query Verification Number or contain a copy of the INS-annotated Form G-845. Whenever the response from automated access to the ASVI directs the eligibility worker to initiate secondary verification, agency records shall show documentation of the ASVI Query Verification Number and contain a copy of the INS Form G-845.

(g) *Normal processing standard*—(1) *Thirty-day processing.* The State agency shall provide eligible households that complete the initial application process an opportunity to participate (as defined in § 274.2(b)) as soon as possible, but no later than 30 calendar days following the date the application was filed, except for residents of public institutions who apply jointly for SSI

and food stamp benefits prior to release from the institution in accordance with § 273.1(e)(2). An application is filed the day the appropriate food stamp office receives an application containing the applicant's name and address, which is signed by either a responsible member of the household or the household's authorized representative. Households entitled to expedited processing are specified in paragraph (i) of this section. For residents of public institutions who apply for food stamps prior to their release from the institution in accordance with § 273.1(e)(2), the State agency shall provide an opportunity to participate as soon as possible, but not later than 30 calendar days from the date of release of the applicant from the institution.

(2) *Combined allotments.* Households which apply for initial month benefits (as described in § 273.10(a)) after the 15th of the month, are processed under normal processing timeframes, have completed the application process within 30 days of the date of application, and have been determined eligible to receive benefits for the initial month of application and the next subsequent month, may be issued a combined allotment at State agency option which includes prorated benefits for the month of application and benefits for the first full month of participation. The benefits shall be issued in accordance with § 274.2(c) of this chapter.

(3) *Denying the application.* Households that are found to be ineligible shall be sent a notice of denial as soon as possible but not later than 30 days following the date the application was filed. If the household has failed to appear for two scheduled interviews and has made no subsequent contact with the State agency to express interest in pursuing the application, the State agency shall send the household a notice of denial on the 30th day following the date of application. The household must file a new application if it wishes to participate in the program. In cases where the State agency was able to conduct an interview and request all of the necessary verification on the same day the application was filed, and no subsequent requests for verification have been made, the State agency may also deny the application on the 30th

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day if the State agency provided assistance to the household in obtaining verification as specified in paragraph (f)(5) of this section, but the household failed to provide the requested verification.

(h) *Delays in processing.* If the State agency does not determine a household's eligibility and provide an opportunity to participate within 30 days following the date the application was filed, the State agency shall take the following action:

(1) *Determining cause.* The State agency shall first determine the cause of the delay using the following criteria:

(i) A delay shall be considered the fault of the household if the household has failed to complete the application process even though the State agency has taken all the action it is required to take to assist the household. The State agency must have taken the following actions before a delay can be considered the fault of the household:

(A) For households that have failed to complete the application form, the State agency must have offered, or attempted to offer, assistance in its completion.

(B) If one or more members of the household have failed to register for work, as required in §273.7, the State agency must have informed the household of the need to register for work and given the household at least 10 days from the date of notification to register these members.

(C) In cases where verification is incomplete, the State agency must have provided the household with a statement of required verification and offered to assist the household in obtaining required verification and allowed the household sufficient time to provide the missing verification. Sufficient time shall be at least 10 days from the date of the State agency's initial request for the particular verification that was missing.

(D) For households that have failed to appear for an interview, the State agency must have attempted to reschedule the initial interview within 30 days following the date the application was filed. However, if the household has failed to appear for the first interview and a subsequent interview is postponed at the household's request or

cannot otherwise be rescheduled until after the 20th day but before the 30th day following the date the application was filed, the household must appear for the interview, bring verification, and register members for work by the 30th day; otherwise, the delay shall be the fault of the household. If the household has failed to appear for the first interview and a subsequent interview is postponed at the household's request until after the 30th day following the date the application was filed, the delay shall be the fault of the household. If the household has missed both scheduled interviews and requests another interview, any delay shall be the fault of the household.

(ii) Delays that are the fault of the State agency include, but are not limited to, those cases where the State agency failed to take the actions described in paragraphs (h)(1)(i) (A) through (D) of this section.

(2) *Delays caused by the household.* (i) If by the 30th day the State agency cannot take any further action on the application due to the fault of the household, the household shall lose its entitlement to benefits for the month of application. However, the State agency shall give the household an additional 30 days to take the required action, except that, if verification is lacking, the State agency has the option of holding the application pending for only 30 days following the date of the initial request for the particular verification that was missing.

(A) The State agency has the option of sending the household either a notice of denial or a notice of pending status on the 30th day. The option chosen may vary from one project area to another, provided the same procedures apply to all households within a project area. However, if a notice of denial is sent and the household takes the required action within 60 days following the date the application was filed, the State agency shall reopen the case without requiring a new application. No further action by the State agency is required after the notice of denial or pending status is sent if the household failed to take the required action within 60 days following the date the application was filed, or if the State agency chooses the option of

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holding the application pending for only 30 days following the date of the initial request for the particular verification that was missing, and the household fails to provide the necessary verification by this 30th day.

(B) State agencies may include in the notice a request that the household report all changes in circumstances since it filed its application. The information that must be contained on the notice of denial or pending status is explained in § 273.10(g)(1) (i) and (iii).

(ii) If the household was at fault for the delay in the first 30-day period, but is found to be eligible during the second 30-day period, the State agency shall provide benefits only from the month following the month of application. The household is not entitled to benefits for the month of application when the delay was the fault of the household.

(3) *Delays caused by the State agency.*

(i) Whenever a delay in the initial 30-day period is the fault of the State agency, the State agency shall take immediate corrective action. Except as specified in §§ 273.2(f)(1)(ii)(F) and 273.2(f)(10)(i), the State agency shall not deny the application if it caused the delay, but shall instead notify the household by the 30th day following the date the application was filed that its application is being held pending. The State agency shall also notify the household of any action it must take to complete the application process. If verification is lacking the State agency has the option of holding the application pending for only 30 days following the date of the initial request for the particular verification that was missing.

(ii) If the household is found to be eligible during the second 30-day period, the household shall be entitled to benefits retroactive to the month of application. If, however, the household is found to be ineligible, the State agency shall deny the application.

(4) *Delays beyond 60 days.* (i) If the State agency is at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30-day period, and the case file is otherwise complete, the State agency shall continue to process the original application until an eligibility determination is reached. If the

household is determined eligible, and the State agency was at fault for the delay in the initial 30 days, the household shall receive benefits retroactive to the month of application. However, if the initial delay was the household's fault, the household shall receive benefits retroactive only to the month following the month of application. The State agency may use the original application to determine the household's eligibility in the months following the 60-day period, or it may require the household to file a new application.

(ii) If the State agency is at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30-day period, but the case file is not complete enough to reach an eligibility determination, the State agency may continue to process the original application, or deny the case and notify the household to file a new application. If the case is denied, the household shall also be advised of its possible entitlement to benefits lost as a result of State agency caused delays in accordance with § 273.17. If the State agency was also at fault for the delay in the initial 30 days, the amount of benefits lost would be calculated from the month of application. If, however, the household was at fault for the initial delay, the amount of benefits lost would be calculated from the month following the month of application.

(iii) If the household is at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30-day period, the State agency shall deny the application and require the household to file a new application if it wishes to participate. If however, the State agency has chosen the option of holding the application pending only until 30 days following the date of the initial request for the particular verification that was missing, and verification is not received by that 30th day, the State agency may immediately close the application. A notice of denial need not be sent if the notice of pending status informed the household that it would have to file a new application if verification was not received within 30 days of the initial request. The household shall not be entitled to any lost benefits, even if the delay in the initial

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30 days was the fault of the State agency.

(i) *Expedited service*—(1) *Entitlement to expedited service.* The following households are entitled to expedited service:

(i) Households with less than \$150 in monthly gross income, as computed in § 273.10 provided their liquid resources (i.e., cash on hand, checking or savings accounts, savings certificates, and lump sum payments as specified in § 273.9(c)(8)) do not exceed \$100;

(ii) Migrant or seasonal farmworker households who are destitute as defined in § 273.10(e)(3) provided their liquid resources (i.e., cash on hand, checking or savings accounts, savings certificates, and lump sum payments as specified in § 273.9(c)(8)) do not exceed \$100;

(iii) Households whose combined monthly gross income and liquid resources are less than the household's monthly rent or mortgage, and utilities (including entitlement to a SUA, as appropriate, in accordance with § 273.9(d)).

(2) *Identifying households needing expedited service.* The State agency's application procedures shall be designed to identify households eligible for expedited service at the time the household requests assistance. For example, a receptionist, volunteer, or other employee shall be responsible for screening applications as they are filed or as individuals come in to apply.

(3) *Processing standards.* All households receiving expedited service, except those receiving it during months in which allotments are suspended or cancelled, shall have their cases processed in accordance with the following provisions. Those households receiving expedited service during suspensions or cancellations shall have their cases processed in accordance with the provisions of § 271.7(e)(2).

(i) *General.* For households entitled to expedited service, the State agency shall make available to the recipient coupons or an ATP card not later than the seventh calendar day following the date an application was filed. For a resident of a public institution who applies for benefits prior to his/her release from the institution in accordance with § 273.1(e)(2) and who is entitled to expedited service, the date of filing of his/her food stamp application

is the date of release of the applicant from the institution. Whatever system a State agency uses to ensure meeting this delivery standard shall be designed to allow a reasonable opportunity for redemption of ATPs no later than the seventh calendar day following the day the application was filed.

(ii) *Drug addicts and alcoholics, group living arrangement facilities.* For residents of drug addiction or alcoholic treatment and rehabilitation centers and residents of group living arrangements who are entitled to expedited service, the State agency shall make available to the recipient coupons or an ATP card not later than the 7 calendar days following the date an application was filed.

(iii) *Out-of-office interviews.* If a household is entitled to expedited service and is also entitled to a waiver of the office interview, the State agency shall conduct the interview (unless the household cannot be reached) and complete the application process within the expedited service standards. The first day of this count is the calendar day following application filing. If the State agency conducts a telephone interview and must mail the application to the household for signature, the mailing time involved will not be calculated in the expedited service standards. Mailing time shall only include the days the application is in the mail to and from the household and the days the application is in the household's possession pending signature and mailing.

(iv) *Late determinations.* If the prescreening required in paragraph (i)(2) of this section fails to identify a household as being entitled to expedited service and the State agency subsequently discovers that the household is entitled to expedited service, the State agency shall provide expedited service to households within the processing standards described in paragraphs (i)(3) (i) and (ii) of this section, except that the processing standard shall be calculated from the date the State agency discovers the household is entitled to expedited service.

(v) *Residents of shelters for battered women and children.* Residents of shelters for battered women and children who are otherwise entitled to expedited

service shall be handled in accordance with the time limits in paragraph (i)(3)(i) of this section.

(4) *Special procedures for expediting service.* The State agency shall use the following procedures when expediting certification and issuance:

(i) In order to expedite the certification process, the State agency shall use the following procedures:

(A) In all cases, the applicant's identity (i.e., the identity of the person making the application) shall be verified through a collateral contact or readily available documentary evidence as specified in paragraph (f)(1) of this section.

(B) All reasonable efforts shall be made to verify within the expedited processing standards, the household's residency in accordance with § 273.2(f)(1)(vi), income statement (including a statement that the household has no income), liquid resources and all other factors required by § 273.2(f), through collateral contacts or readily available documentary evidence. However, benefits shall not be delayed beyond the delivery standards prescribed in paragraph (i)(3) of this section, solely because these eligibility factors have not been verified.

State agencies also may verify factors other than identity, residency, and income provided that verification can be accomplished within expedited processing standards. State agencies should attempt to obtain as much additional verification as possible during the interview, but should not delay the certification of households entitled to expedited service for the full timeframes specified in paragraph (i)(3) of this section when the State agency has determined it is unlikely that other verification can be obtained within these timeframes. Households entitled to expedited service will be asked to furnish a social security number for each person or apply for one for each person before the second full month of participation. Those household members unable to provide the required SSN's or who do not have one prior to the second full month of participation shall be allowed to continue to participate only if they satisfy the good cause requirements with respect to SSN's specified in § 273.6(d), except that

households with a newborn may have up to 6 months following the month the baby was born to supply an SSN or proof of an application for an SSN for the newborn in accordance with § 273.6(b)(4). The State agency may attempt to register other household members but shall postpone the registration of other household members if it cannot be accomplished within the expedited service timeframes. With regard to the work registration requirements specified in § 273.7, the State agency shall, at a minimum, require the applicant to register (unless exempt or unless the household has designated an authorized representative to apply on its behalf in accordance with § 273.1(f)). The State agency may attempt registration of other household members by requesting that the applicant complete the work registration forms for other household members to the best of his or her ability. The State agency may also attempt to accomplish work registration for other household members in a timely manner through other means, such as calling the household. The State agency may attempt to verify questionable work registration exemptions, but such verification shall be postponed if the expedited service timeframes cannot be met.

(ii) Once an acceptable collateral contact has been designated, the State agency shall promptly contact the collateral contact, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (f)(4)(ii) of this section. Although the household has the primary responsibility for providing other types of verification, the State agency shall assist the household in promptly obtaining the necessary verification.

(iii) Households that are certified on an expedited basis and have provided all necessary verification required in paragraph (f) of this section prior to certification shall be assigned normal certification periods. If verification was postponed, the State agency may certify these households for the month of application (the month of application and the subsequent month for those households applying after the 15th of the month) or, at the State agency's option, may assign normal

certification periods to those households whose circumstances would otherwise warrant longer certification periods. State agencies, at their option, may request any household eligible for expedited service which applies after the 15th of the month and is certified for the month of application and the subsequent month only to submit a second application (at the time of the initial certification) if the household's verification is postponed.

(A) For households applying on or before the 15th of the month, the State agency may assign a one-month certification period or assign a normal certification period. Satisfaction of the verification requirements may be postponed until the second month of participation. If a one-month certification period is assigned, the notice of eligibility may be combined with the notice of expiration or a separate notice may be sent. The notice of eligibility must explain that the household has to satisfy all verification requirements that were postponed. For subsequent months, the household must reapply and satisfy all verification requirements which were postponed or be certified under normal processing standards. If the household does not satisfy the postponed verification requirements and does not appear for the interview, the State agency does not need to contact the household again.

(B) For households applying after the 15th of the month, the State agency may assign a 2-month certification period or a normal certification period of no more than 12 months. Verification may be postponed until the third month of participation, if necessary, to meet the expedited timeframe. If a two-month certification period is assigned, the notice of eligibility may be combined with the notice of expiration or a separate notice may be sent. The notice of eligibility must explain that the household is obligated to satisfy the verification requirements that were postponed. For subsequent months, the household must reapply and satisfy the verification requirements which were postponed or be certified under normal processing standards. If the household does not satisfy the postponed verification requirements and does not attend the inter-

view, the State agency does not need to contact the household again. When a certification period of longer than 2 months is assigned and verification is postponed, households must be sent a notice of eligibility advising that no benefits for the third month will be issued until the postponed verification requirements are satisfied. The notice must also advise the household that if the verification process results in changes in the household's eligibility or level of benefits, the State agency will act on those changes without advance notice of adverse action.

(C) Households which apply for initial benefits (as described in § 273.10(a)) after the 15th of the month, are entitled to expedited service, have completed the application process, and have been determined eligible to receive benefits for the initial month and the next subsequent month, shall receive a combined allotment consisting of prorated benefits for the initial month of application and benefits for the first full month of participation within the expedited service timeframe. If necessary, verification shall be postponed to meet the expedited timeframe. The benefits shall be issued in accordance with § 274.2(c) of this chapter.

(D) The provisions of paragraph (i)(4)(iii)(C) of this section do not apply to households which have been determined ineligible to receive benefits for the month of application or the following month, or to households which have not satisfied the postponed verification requirements. However, households eligible for expedited service may receive benefits for the initial month and next subsequent month under the verification standards of paragraph (i)(4) of this section.

(E) If the State agency chooses to exercise the option to require a second application in accordance with paragraph (i)(4)(iii) of this section and receives the application before the third month, it shall not deny the application but hold it pending until the third month. The State agency will issue the third month's benefits within 5 working days from receipt of the necessary verification information but not before the first day of the month. If the postponed verification requirements are

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not completed before the end of the third month, the State agency shall terminate the household's participation and shall issue no further benefits.

(iv) There is no limit to the number of times a household can be certified under expedited procedures, as long as prior to each expedited certification, the household either completes the verification requirements that were postponed at the last expedited certification or was certified under normal processing standards since the last expedited certification. The provisions of this section shall not apply at recertification if a household reapplies before the end of its current certification period.

(v) Households requesting, but not entitled to, expedited service shall have their applications processed according to normal standards.

(j) *PA, GA and categorically eligible households.* Households applying for public assistance (PA) shall be notified of their right to apply for food stamp benefits at the same time and shall be allowed to apply for food stamp benefits at the same time they apply for PA benefits. The applications of these households shall be processed in accordance with the requirements of paragraph (j)(1) of this section, and their eligibility shall be based solely on food stamp eligibility criteria unless the household is categorically eligible, as provided in paragraph (j)(2) of this section. If a State has a single Statewide GA application form, households in which all members are included in a State or local GA grant shall have their application for food stamps included in the GA application form. State agencies shall use the joint application processing procedures described in paragraph (j)(1) of this section for GA recipients in accordance with paragraph (j)(3) of this section. The eligibility of jointly processed GA households shall be based solely on food stamp eligibility criteria unless the household is categorically eligible as provided in paragraph (j)(4) of this section. The benefit levels of all households shall be based solely on food stamp criteria. Jointly processed and categorically eligible households shall be certified in accordance with food stamp procedural, timeliness, and no-

tice requirements, including the 5-day expedited service provisions of § 273.2(i) and normal 30-day application processing standards of § 273.2(g). Individuals authorized to receive PA, SSI, or GA benefits but who have not yet received payment are considered recipients of benefits from those programs. In addition, individuals are considered recipients of PA, SSI, or GA if their PA, SSI, or GA benefits are suspended or recouped. Individuals entitled to PA, SSI, or GA benefits but who are not paid such benefits because the grant is less than a minimum benefit are also considered recipients. Individuals not receiving GA, PA, or SSI benefits who are entitled to Medicaid only shall not be considered recipients.

(1) *Applicant PA households.* (i) The application for PA shall contain all the information necessary to determine a household's food stamp eligibility and level of benefits. Information relevant only to food stamp eligibility shall be contained in the PA form or shall be an attachment to it. The joint PA/food stamp application shall clearly indicate that the household is providing information for both programs, is subject to the criminal penalties of both programs for making false statements, waives the notice of adverse action as specified by both programs for making false statements, and waives the notice of adverse action as specified in paragraph (j)(1)(iv) of this section. The joint PA/food stamp application may be used for all food stamp applicants provided the application form is approved for all households by FNS.

(ii) The State agency shall conduct a single interview at initial application for both public assistance and food stamp purposes. PA households shall not be required to see a different eligibility worker or otherwise be subjected to two interview requirements to obtain the benefits of both programs. Following the single interview, the application may be processed by separate workers to determine eligibility and benefit levels for food stamps and public assistance. A household's eligibility for food stamp out-of-office interview provisions in § 273.2(e)(2) does not relieve the household of any responsibility for a face-to-face interview to be certified for PA.

(iii) For households applying for both public assistance and food stamps, the verification procedures described in paragraphs (f)(1) through (f)(8) of this section shall be followed for those factors of eligibility which are needed solely for purposes of determining the household's eligibility for food stamps. For those factors of eligibility which are needed to determine both PA eligibility and food stamp eligibility, the State agency may use the PA verification rules. However, the State agency shall not delay the household's food stamp benefits if, at the end of 30 days following the date the application was filed, the State agency has sufficient verification to meet the verification requirements of paragraphs (f)(1) through (f)(8) of this section but does not have sufficient verification to meet the PA verification rules.

(iv) In order to determine if a household will be eligible due to its status as a recipient PA/SSI household, the State agency may temporarily postpone, within the 30-day processing standard, the food stamp eligibility determination if the household is not entitled to expedited service and appears to be categorically eligible. However, the State agency shall postpone denying a potentially categorically eligible household until the 30th day in case the household is determined eligible to receive PA benefits. Once the PA application is approved, the household is to be considered categorically eligible if it meets all the criteria concerning categorical eligibility in §273.2(j)(2). If the State agency can anticipate the amount and the date of receipt of the initial PA payment, but the payment will not be received until a subsequent month, the State agency shall vary the household's food stamp benefit level according to the anticipated receipt of the payment and notify the household. Portions of initial PA payments intended to retroactively cover a previous month shall be disregarded as lump sum payments under §273.9(c)(8). If the amount or date of receipt of the initial PA payment cannot be reasonably anticipated at the time of the food stamp eligibility determination, the PA payments shall be handled as a change in circumstances. However, the

State agency is not required to send a notice of adverse action if the receipt of the PA grant reduces, suspends or terminates the household's food stamp benefits, provided the household is notified in advance that its benefits may be reduced, suspended, or terminated when the grant is received. The case may be terminated if the household is not categorically eligible. The State agency shall ensure that the denied application of a potentially categorically eligible household is easily retrievable. For a household filing a joint application for food stamps and PA benefits or a household that has a PA application pending and is denied food stamps but is later determined eligible to receive PA benefits and is otherwise categorically eligible, the State agency shall provide benefits using the original application and any other pertinent information occurring subsequent to that application. Except for residents of public institutions who apply jointly for SSI and food stamp benefits prior to their release from a public institution in accordance with §273.1(e)(2), benefits shall be paid from the beginning of the period for which PA or SSI benefits are paid, the original food stamp application date, or December 23, 1985 whichever is later. Residents of public institutions who apply jointly for SSI and food stamp benefits prior to their release from the institution shall be paid benefits from the date of their release from the institution. In situations where the State agency must update and reevaluate the original application of a denied case, the State agency shall not reinterview the household, but shall use any available information to update the application. The State agency shall then contact the household by phone or mail to explain and confirm changes made by the State agency and to determine if other changes in household circumstances have occurred. If any information obtained from the household differs from that which the State agency obtained from available information or the household provided additional changes in information, the State agency shall arrange for the household or its authorized representative to initial *all* changes, re-sign and date the updated application and provide necessary

verification. In no event can benefits be provided prior to the date of the original food stamp application filed on or after December 23, 1985. Any household that is determined to be eligible to receive PA benefits for a period of time within the 30-day food stamp processing time, shall be provided food stamp benefits back to the date of the food stamp application. However, in no event shall food stamp benefits be paid for a month for which such household is ineligible for receipt of any PA benefits for the month, unless the household is eligible for food stamp benefits and an NPA case. Benefits shall be prorated in accordance with § 273.10(a)(1)(ii) and (e)(2)(ii)(B). Household that file joint applications that are found categorically eligible after being denied NPA food stamps shall have their benefits for the initial month prorated from the date from which the PA benefits are payable, or the date of the original food stamp application, whichever is later. The State agency shall act on reevaluating the original application either at the household's request or when it becomes otherwise aware of the household's PA and/or SSI eligibility. The household shall be informed on the notice of denial required by § 273.10(g)(1)(ii) to notify the State agency if its PA or SSI benefits are approved.

(v) Households whose PA applications are denied shall not be required to file new food stamp applications but shall have their food stamp eligibility determined or continued on the basis of the original applications filed jointly for PA and food stamp purposes and any other documented information obtained subsequent to the application which may have been used in the PA determination and which is relevant to food stamp eligibility or level of benefits.

(2) *Categorically eligible PA and SSI households.* (i) Any household (except those listed in paragraph (j)(2)(iii) of this section) in which all members receive or are authorized to receive PA and/or SSI benefits shall be considered eligible for food stamps because of their status as PA and/or SSI recipients unless the entire household is institutionalized as defined in § 273.1(e) or disqualified for any reason from receiving

food stamps. Residents of public institutions who apply jointly for SSI and food stamp benefits prior to their release from the institution in accordance with § 273.1(e)(2), shall not be categorically eligible upon a finding by SSA of potential SSI eligibility prior to such release. The individuals shall be considered categorically eligible at such time as a final SSI eligibility determination has been made and the individual has been released from the institution. The eligibility factors which are deemed for food stamp eligibility without the verification required in § 273.2(f) because of PA/SSI status are the resource, gross and net income limits; social security number information; sponsored alien information; and residency. If any of the following factors are questionable, the State agency shall verify, in accordance with § 273.2(f), that the household which is considered categorically eligible:

(A) Contains only members that are PA or SSI recipients as defined in the introductory paragraph § 273.2(j);

(B) Meets the household definition in § 273.1(a);

(C) Includes all persons who purchase and prepare food together in one food stamp household regardless of whether or not they are separate units for PA or SSI purposes; and

(D) Includes no persons who have been disqualified as provided for in paragraph (j)(2)(iii) of this section.

(ii) Households subject to retrospective budgeting that have been suspended for PA purposes as provided for in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) regulations, or that receive zero benefits shall continue to be considered as authorized to receive benefits from the appropriate agency. Categorical eligibility shall be assumed at recertification in the absence of a timely PA redetermination. If a recertified household is subsequently terminated from PA benefits, the procedures in § 273.12(f)(3), (4), and (5) shall be followed, as appropriate.

(iii) Under no circumstances shall any household be considered categorically eligible if:

(A) Any member of that household is disqualified for an intentional Program violation in accordance with § 273.16 or

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for failure to comply with monthly reporting requirements in accordance with § 273.21;

(B) The entire household is disqualified because one or more of its members failed to comply with workfare in accordance with § 273.22; or

(C) The head of the household is disqualified for failure to comply with the work requirements in accordance with § 273.7.

(iv) These households are subject to all food stamp eligibility and benefits provisions (including the provisions of § 273.11(c)) and cannot be reinstated in the Program on the basis of categorical eligibility provisions.

(v) No person shall be included as a member in any household which is otherwise categorically eligible if that person is:

(A) An ineligible alien as defined in § 273.4;

(B) Ineligible under the student provisions in § 273.5;

(C) An SSI recipient in a cash-out State as defined in § 273.20; or

(D) Institutionalized in a nonexempt facility as defined in § 273.1(e).

(E) Ineligible because of failure to comply with a work requirement of § 273.7.

(vi) For the purposes of work registration, the exemptions in § 273.7(b) shall be applied to individuals in categorically eligible households. Any such individual who is not exempt from work registration is subject to the other work requirements in § 273.7.

(vii) When determining eligibility for a categorically eligible household all provisions of this subchapter except for those listed below shall apply:

(A) Section 273.8 except for the last sentence of paragraph (a).

(B) Section 273.9(a) except for the fourth sentence in the introductory paragraph.

(C) Section 273.10(a)(1)(i).

(D) Section 273.10(b).

(E) Section 273.10(c) for the purposes of eligibility.

(F) Section 273.10(e)(2)(iii)(A).

(3) *Applicant GA households.* (i) State agencies shall use the joint application processing procedures in paragraph (j)(1) of this section for GA households, except for the effective date of categorical eligibility, when the criteria in

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paragraphs (j)(3)(i) (A) and (B) of this section are met. Benefits for GA households that are categorically eligible, as provided in paragraph (j)(4) of this section, shall be provided from the date of the original food stamp application, the beginning of the period for which GA benefits are authorized, or the effective date of State GA categorical eligibility (February 1, 1991) or local GA categorical eligibility (August 1, 1992), whichever is later:

(A) The State agency administers a GA program which uses formalized application procedures and eligibility criteria that test levels of income and resources; and,

(B) Administration of the GA program is integrated with the administration of the PA or food stamp programs, in that the same eligibility workers process applications for GA benefits and PA or food stamp benefits.

(ii) State agencies in which different eligibility workers process applications for GA benefits and PA or food stamp benefits, but procedures otherwise meet the criteria in paragraph (j)(3)(i) of this section may, with FNS approval, jointly process GA and food stamp applications. If approved, State agencies shall adhere to the joint application processing procedures in paragraph (j)(1) of this section, except for the effective date of categorical eligibility for GA households. Benefits shall be provided GA households that are categorically eligible, as provided in paragraph (j)(4) of this section, from the date of the original food stamp application, the beginning of the period for which GA benefits are authorized, or the effective date of State GA categorical eligibility (February 1, 1992) or local GA categorical eligibility (August 1, 1992), whichever is later.

(iii) Requirements for combining the GA and food stamp application forms or providing food stamp application forms to GA applicant households depend on the extent to which application forms and administration of the GA and food stamp programs are integrated.

(A) State agencies that have a single Statewide GA application form shall include the food stamp application form in the GA application form and shall inform GA applicant households

that they may be categorically eligible for food stamps. The joint GA and food stamp application form shall clearly indicate that the household is providing information for both programs and is subject to the criminal penalties of both programs for making false statements. The application form must also notify the household that if food stamp benefits are issued before the GA is approved, the food stamp benefits may be reduced without further notice when the GA assistance is approved (as specified in § 273.2(j)(1)(iv) and § 273.13(b)(6)). With FNS approval, the joint GA and food stamp application form may be used for households applying only for food stamps.

(B) State agencies that do not have a single Statewide GA application form but have local offices in which the same agency administers both the GA program and the Food Stamp Program shall provide households applying for a local GA grant with a food stamp application form at the time of their application for GA, along with information concerning how to apply for food stamps, and information about possible categorical eligibility.

(C) If GA and the Food Stamp Program are administered by separate offices and a single application form is not required, the State agency shall encourage the agencies administering GA to refer GA applicants to the local food stamp office or provide applicant households with food stamp application forms and inform GA applicants of their potential categorical eligibility for food stamps. State agencies may allow GA applicants to leave a food stamp application form at the GA office which contains, at a minimum, the applicant's name, address and signature. If the GA office accepts a food stamp application form, it is responsible for forwarding the application form the same day to the appropriate food stamp office for processing. The procedural and timeliness requirements that apply to the application process shall begin when the food stamp office receives the application form. The GA office may advise households that they may receive faster service if they take the application form directly to the food stamp office.

(D) In areas where GA programs are administered by agencies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the Department of the Interior, the State agency shall endeavor to gain the cooperation of the agencies in referring GA applicants to the food stamp office. Where possible, this referral should consist of informing the GA applicants of their potential eligibility for food stamp benefits, providing them with food stamp applications and directing them to the local food stamp office.

(4) *Categorically eligible GA households.* Households in which each member receives benefits from a State or local GA program which meets the criteria for conferring categorical eligibility in paragraph (j)(4)(i) of this section shall be categorically eligible for food stamps unless the individual or household is ineligible as specified in paragraph (j)(4)(iv) and (j)(4)(v) of this section.

(i) *Certification of qualifying programs.* Recipients of benefits from programs that meet the criteria in paragraphs (j)(4)(i)(A) through (j)(4)(i)(C) of this section shall be considered categorically eligible to receive benefits from the Food Stamp Program. If a program does not meet all of these criteria, the State agency may submit a program description to the appropriate FNS regional office for a determination. The description should contain, at a minimum, the type of assistance provided, the income eligibility standard, and the period for which the assistance is provided.

(A) The program must have income standards which do not exceed the gross income eligibility standard in § 273.9(a)(1). The rules of the GA program apply in determining countable income.

(B) The program must provide GA benefits as defined in § 271.2 of this part.

(C) The program must provide benefits which are not limited to one-time emergency assistance.

(ii) *Verification requirements.* In determining whether a household is categorically eligible, the State agency shall verify that each member receives PA benefits, SSI, or GA from a program that meets the criteria in paragraph (j)(4)(i) section or that has been

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certified by FNS as an appropriate program and that it includes no individuals who have been disqualified as provided in paragraph (j)(4)(iv) or (j)(2)(v) of this section. The State agency shall also verify household composition if it is questionable, in accordance with § 273.2(f), in order to determine that the household meets the definition of a household in § 273.1(a).

(iii) *Deemed eligibility factors.* When determining eligibility for a categorically eligible household, all Food Stamp Program requirements apply except the following:

(A) Resources. None of the provisions of § 273.8 apply to categorically eligible households except the second sentence of § 273.8(a) pertaining to categorical eligibility and § 273.8(i) concerning transfer of resources. The provision in § 273.10(b) regarding resources available the time of the interview does not apply to categorically eligible households.

(B) Gross and net income limits. None of the provisions in § 273.9(a) relating to income eligibility standards apply to categorically eligible households, except the fourth sentence pertaining to categorical eligibility. The provisions in §§ 273.10(a)(1)(i) and 273.10(c) relating to the income eligibility determination also do not apply to categorically eligible households.

(C) Zero benefit households. The provision of § 273.10(e)(2)(iii)(A) which allows a State agency to deny the application of a household with three or more members entitled to no benefits because its net income exceeds the level at which benefits are issued does not apply to categorically eligible households. All eligible households of one or two persons must be provided the minimum benefit, as required by § 273.10(e)(2)(ii)(C).

(D) Residency.

(E) Sponsored alien information.

(iv) *Ineligible household members.* No person shall be included as a member of an otherwise categorically eligible household if that person is:

(A) An ineligible alien, as defined in § 273.4;

(B) An ineligible student, as defined in § 273.5;

(C) Disqualified for failure to provide or apply for an SSN, as required by § 273.6;

(D) A household member, not the head of household, disqualified for failure to comply with a work requirement of § 273.7;

(E) Disqualified for intentional program violation, as required by § 273.16;

(F) An SSI recipient in a cash-out State, as defined in § 273.20; or

(G) An individual who is institutionalized in a nonexempt facility, as defined in § 273.1(e).

(v) *Ineligible households.* A household shall not be considered categorically eligible if:

(A) It refuses to cooperate in providing information to the State agency that is necessary for making a determination of its eligibility or for completing any subsequent review of its eligibility, as described in § 273.2(d) and § 273.21(m)(1)(ii);

(B) The household is disqualified because the head of household fails to comply with a work requirement of § 273.7;

(C) The household is ineligible under the striker provisions of § 273.1(g); or

(D) The household is ineligible because it knowingly transferred resources for the purpose of qualifying or attempting to qualify for the Program, as provided in § 273.8(i).

(vi) *Combination households.* Households consisting entirely of recipients of PA, SSI and/or GA from a program that meets the requirements of § 273.2(j)(4)(i) shall be categorically eligible in accordance with the provisions for paragraphs (j)(2)(iii) and (j)(2)(v) of this section for members receiving PA and SSI or provisions of paragraphs (j)(4)(iv) and (v) of this section for members receiving GA.

(5) *Households with some PA or GA recipients.* State agencies that use the joint application processing procedures in paragraphs (j)(1) and (j)(3) of this section may apply these procedures to a food stamp applicant household in which some, but not all, members are in the PA/GA filing unit, except for procedures concerning categorical eligibility. If the State agency decides not to use the joint application procedures for these households, the households shall file separate applications

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for PA/GA and food stamp benefits. This decision shall not be made on a case-by-case basis, but shall be applied uniformly to all households of this type in a project area.

(k) *SSI households.* For purposes of this paragraph, SSI is defined as Federal SSI payments made under title XVI of the Social Security Act, federally administered optional supplementary payments under section 1616 of that Act, or federally administered mandatory supplementary payments made under section 212(a) of Pub. L. 93-66. Except in cashout States (§273.20), households which have not applied for food stamps in the thirty preceding days, and which do not have applications pending, may apply and be certified for food stamp benefits in accordance with the procedures described in §273.2(k)(1)(i) or §273.2(k)(1)(ii) and with the notice, procedural and timeliness requirements of the Food Stamp Act of 1977 and its implementing regulations. Households applying simultaneously for SSI and food stamps shall be subject to food stamp eligibility criteria, and benefit levels shall be based solely on food stamp eligibility criteria until the household is considered categorically eligible. However, households in which all members are either PA or SSI recipients or authorized to receive PA or SSI benefits (as discussed in §273.2(j)) shall be food stamp eligible based on their PA/SSI status as provided for in §273.2(j)(1)(iv) and (j)(2). Households denied NPA food stamps that have an SSI application pending shall be informed on the notice of denial of the possibility of categorical eligibility if they become SSI recipients. The State agency shall make an eligibility determination based on information provided by SSA or by the household.

(1) *Initial application and eligibility determination.* At each SSA office, the State agency shall either arrange for SSA to complete and forward food stamp applications, or the State agency shall outstation State food stamp eligibility workers at the SSA Offices with SSA's concurrence, based upon an agreement negotiated between the State agency and the SSA.

(i) If the State agency arranges with the SSA to complete and forward food

stamp applications the following actions shall be taken:

(A) Whenever a member of a household consisting only of SSI applicants or recipients transacts business at an SSA office, the SSA shall inform the household of:

(1) Its right to apply for food stamps at the SSA office without going to the food stamp office; and

(2) Its right to apply at a food stamp office if it chooses to do so.

(B) The SSA will accept and complete food stamp applications received at the SSA Office from SSI households and forward them, within one working day after receipt of a signed application, to a designated office of the State agency. SSA shall also forward to the State agency a transmittal form which will be approved by SSA and FNS. The SSA will use the national food stamp application form for joint processing. State agencies may substitute a State food stamp application, provided that prior approval is received from both FNS and SSA. SSA shall approve, deny, or comment upon FNS-approved State food stamp applications within thirty days of their submission to SSA.

(C) SSA will accept and complete food stamp applications from SSI households received by SSA staff in contact stations. SSA will forward all food stamp applications from SSI households to the designated food stamp office.

(D) The SSA staff shall complete joint SSI and food stamp applications for residents of public institutions in accordance with §273.1(e)(2).

(E) The State agency shall designate an address for the SSA to forward food stamp applications and accompanying information to the State agency for eligibility determination. Applications and accompanying information must be forwarded to the agreed upon address in accordance with the time standards contained in §273.2(k)(1)(i)(B).

(F) Except for applications taken in accordance with paragraph (k)(1)(i)(D) of this section, the State agency shall make an eligibility determination and issue food stamp benefits to eligible SSI households within 30 days following the date the application was received by the SSA. Applications shall

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be considered filed for normal processing purposes when the signed application is received by SSA. The expedited processing time standards shall begin on the date the State agency receives a food stamp application. The State agency shall make an eligibility determination and issue food stamp benefits to a resident of a public institution who applies jointly for SSI and food stamps within 30 days following the date of the applicant's release from the institution. Expedited processing time standards for an applicant who has applied for food stamps and SSI prior to release shall also begin on the date of the applicant's release from the institution in accordance with § 273.2 (i)(3)(i). SSA shall notify the State agency of the date of release of the applicant from the institution. If, for any reason, the State agency is not notified on a timely basis of the applicant's release date, the State agency shall restore benefits in accordance with § 273.17 to such applicant back to the date of release. Food stamp applications and supporting documentation sent to an incorrect food stamp office shall be sent to the correct office, by the State agency, within one working day of their receipt in accordance with § 273.2(c)(2)(ii).

(G) Households in which all members are applying for or participating in SSI will not be required to see a State eligibility worker, or otherwise be subjected to an additional State interview. The food stamp application will be processed by the State agency. The State agency shall not contact the household further in order to obtain information for certification for food stamp benefits unless: the application is improperly completed; mandatory verification required by § 273.2(f)(1) is missing; or, the State agency determines that certain information on the application is questionable. In no event would the applicant be required to appear at the food stamp office to finalize the eligibility determination. Further contact made in accordance with this paragraph shall not constitute a second food stamp certification interview.

(H) SSA shall refer non-SSI households to the correct food stamp office. The State agencies shall process those applications in accordance with the

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procedures noted in § 273.2. Applications from such households shall be considered filed on the date the signed application is taken at the correct State agency office, and the normal and expedited processing time standards shall begin on that date.

(I) The SSA shall prescreen all applications for entitlement to expedited services on the day the application is received at the SSA office and shall mark "Expedited Processing" on the first page of all households' applications that appear to be entitled to such processing. The SSA will inform households which appear to meet the criteria for expedited service that benefits may be issued a few days sooner if the household applies directly at the food stamp office. The household may take the application from SSA to the food stamp office for screening, an interview, and processing of the application. This provision does not apply to applications described in paragraph (k)(1)(i)(D) of this section.

(J) The State agency shall prescreen all applications received from the SSA for entitlement to expedited service on the day the application is received at the correct food stamp office. All SSI households entitled to expedited service shall be certified in accordance with § 273.2(i) except that the expedited processing time standard shall begin on the date the application is received at the correct State agency office, unless the applicant is a resident of a public institution as described in § 273.1(e)(2).

(K) The State agency shall develop and implement a method to determine if members of SSI households whose applications are forwarded by the SSA are already participating in the Food Stamp Program directly through the State agency.

(L) If SSA takes an SSI application or redetermination on the telephone from a member of a pure SSI household, a food stamp application shall also be completed during the telephone interview. In these cases, the food stamp application shall be mailed to the claimant for signature for return to the SSA office or to the State agency. SSA shall then forward any food stamp applications it receives to the State agency. The State agency may

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not require the household to be interviewed again in the food stamp office. The State agency shall not contact the household further in order to obtain information for certification for food stamp benefits except in accordance with § 273.2(k)(1)(i)(F).

(M) To SSI recipients redetermined for SSI by mail, the SSA shall send a staffer informing them of their right to file a food stamp application at the SSA office (if they are members of a pure SSI household) or at their local food stamp office, and their right to an out-of-office food stamp interview to be performed by the State agency if the household is unable to appoint an authorized representative.

(N) Section 272.4 bilingual requirements shall not apply to the Social Security Administration.

(O) State agencies shall provide and SSA shall distribute an information sheet or brochure to all households processed under this paragraph. This material shall inform the household of the following: The address and telephone number of the household's correct food stamp office, the remaining actions to be taken in the application process, and a statement that a household should be notified of the food stamp determinations within thirty days and can contact the food stamp office if it receives no notification within thirty days, or has other questions or problems. It shall also include the client's rights and responsibilities (including fair hearings, authorized representatives, out-of-office interviews, reporting changes and timely re-application), information on how and where to obtain coupons, and how to use coupons (including the commodities clients may purchase with coupons).

(P) As part of the SSA-State agency joint food stamp processing agreement, States may negotiate, on behalf of project areas, to have SSA provide initial eligibility and payment data where the local area is unable to access accurate and timely data through the State's SDX. However, in negotiating such agreements, SSA may challenge a State's determination that it does not have the computer capability to use SDX data. If SSA, FNS, and the State are unable to resolve this matter, and

SSA determines that a State does have the capability to provide accurate and timely SDX data to the food stamp project area, SSA is not required to provide alternate means of transmitting initial SSI eligibility and payment data.

(ii) If the State agency chooses to outstation eligibility workers at SSA offices, with SSA's concurrence, the following actions shall be completed.

(A) SSA will provide adequate space for State food stamp eligibility workers in SSA offices.

(B) The State agency shall have at least one outstationed worker on duty at all time periods during which households will be referred for food stamp application processing. In most cases this would require the availability of an outstationed worker throughout normal SSA business hours.

(C) The following households shall be entitled to file food stamp applications with, and be interviewed by an outstationed eligibility worker:

(1) Households containing an applicant for or recipient of SSI;

(2) Households which do not have an applicant for or recipient of SSI, but which contain an applicant for or recipient of benefits under title II of the Social Security Act, if the State agency and SSA have an agreement to allow the processing of such households at SSA offices.

(D) Households shall be interviewed for food stamps on the day of application unless there is insufficient time to conduct an interview. The State agency shall arrange for the outstationed worker to interview applicants as soon as possible.

(E) The State agency shall not refuse to provide service to persons served by the SSA office because they do not reside in the county or project area in which the SSA office is located, provided, however, that they reside within the jurisdictions served by the SSA office and the State agency. The State agency is not required to process the applications of persons who are not residing within the SSA office jurisdiction but who do reside within the State agency's jurisdiction, other than to forward the forms to the correct food stamp offices.

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(F) The State agency may permit the eligibility worker outstationed at the SSA to determine the eligibility of households, or may require that completed applications be forwarded elsewhere for the eligibility determination.

(G) Applications from households entitled to joint processing through an outstationed eligibility worker shall be considered filed on the date they are submitted to that worker. Both the normal and expedited service time standards shall begin on that date.

(H) Households not entitled to joint processing shall be entitled to obtain and submit applications at the SSA office. The outstationed eligibility worker need not process these applications except to forward them to the correct food stamp office where they shall be considered filed upon receipt (any activities beyond acceptance and referral of the application would require SSA concurrence). Both the normal and expedited service time standards shall begin on that date.

(iii) Regardless of whether the State agency or SSA conducts the food stamp interview, the following actions shall be taken:

(A) *Verification.* (1) The State agency shall ensure that information required by §273.2(f) is verified prior to certification for households initially applying. Households entitled to expedited certification services shall be processed in accordance with §273.2(i).

(2) The State agency has the option of verifying SSI benefit payments through the State Data Exchange (SDX), the Beneficiary Data Exchange (BENDEX) and/or through verification provided by the household.

(3) State agencies may verify other information through SDX and BENDEX but only to the extent permitted by data exchange agreements with SSA. Information verified through SDX or BENDEX shall not be reverified unless it is questionable. Households shall be given the opportunity to provide verification from another source if all necessary information is not available on the SDX or the BENDEX, or if the SDX/BENDEX information is contradictory to other household information.

(B) *Certification period.* (1) State agencies shall certify households under

these procedures for up to twelve months, according to the standards in §273.10(f), except for State agencies which must assign the initial certification period to coincide with adjustments to the SSI benefit amount as designated in §273.10(f)(3)(iii).

(2) In cases jointly processed in which the SSI determination results in denial, and the State agency believes that food stamp eligibility or benefit levels may be affected, the State agency shall send the household a notice of expiration advising that the certification period will expire the end of the month following the month in which the notice is sent and that it must reapply if it wishes to continue to participate. The notice shall also explain that its certification period is expiring because of changes in circumstances which may affect food stamp eligibility or benefit levels and that the household may be entitled to an out-of-office interview, in accordance with §273.2(e)(2).

(C) *Changes in circumstances.* (1) Households shall report changes in accordance with the requirements in §273.12. The State agency shall process changes in accordance with §273.12.

(2) Within ten days of learning of the determination of the application for SSI through SDX, the household, advisement from SSA where SSA agrees to do so for households processed under §273.2(k)(1)(i), or from any other source, the State agency shall take required action in accordance with §273.12. State agencies are encouraged to monitor the results of the SSI determination through SDX and BENDEX to the extent practical.

(3) The State agency shall process adjustments to SSI cases resulting from mass changes, in accordance with provisions of §273.12(e).

(D) *SSI households applying at the food stamp office.* The State agency shall allow SSI households to submit food stamp applications to local food stamp offices rather than through the SSA if the household chooses. In such cases all verification, including that pertaining to SSI program benefits, shall be provided by the household, by SDX or BENDEX, or obtained by the State agency rather than being provided by the SSA.

(E) *Restoration of lost benefits.* The State agency shall restore to the household benefits which were lost whenever the loss was caused by an error by the State agency or by the Social Security Administration through joint processing. Such an error shall include, but not be limited to, the loss of an applicant's food stamp application after it has been filed with SSA or with a State agency's outstationed worker. Lost benefits shall be restored in accordance with § 273.17.

(2) *Recertification.* (i) The State agency shall complete the application process and approve or deny timely applications for recertification in accordance with § 273.14 of the food stamp regulations. A face-to-face interview shall be waived if requested by a household consisting entirely of SSI participants unable to appoint an authorized representative. The State agency shall provide SSI households with a notice of expiration in accordance with § 273.14(b), except that such notification shall inform households consisting entirely of SSI recipients that they are entitled to a waiver of a face-to-face interview if the household is unable to appoint an authorized representative.

(ii) Households shall be entitled to make a timely application (in accordance with § 273.14(b)(3)) for food stamp recertification at an SSA office under the following conditions.

(A) In SSA offices where § 273.2(k)(1)(i) is in effect, SSA shall accept the application of a pure SSI household and forward the completed application, transmittal form and any available verification to the designated food stamp office. Where SSA accepts and refers the application in such situations, the household shall not be required to appear at a second office interview, although the State agency may conduct an out-of-office interview, if necessary.

(B) In SSA offices where § 273.2(k)(1)(ii) is in effect, the outstationed worker shall accept the application and interview the recipient and the State agency shall process the application according to § 273.14.

(1) *Households applying for or receiving social security benefits.* An applicant for or recipient of social security benefits under title II of the Social Security

Act shall be informed at the SSA office of the availability of benefits under the Food Stamp Program and the availability of a Food Stamp Program application at the SSA office. The SSA office is not required to accept applications and conduct interviews for title II applicants/recipients in the manner prescribed in § 273.2(k) for SSI applicants/recipients unless the State agency has chosen to outstation eligibility workers at the SSA office and has an agreement with SSA to allow the processing of such households at SSA offices. In these cases, processing shall be in accordance with § 273.2(k)(1)(ii).

(m) *Households where not all members are applying for or receiving SSI.* An applicant for or recipient of SSI shall be informed at the SSA office of the availability of benefits under the Food Stamp Program and the availability of a food stamp application at the SSA office. The SSA office is not required to accept applications or to conduct interviews for SSI applicants or recipients who are not members of households in which all are SSI applicants or recipients unless the State agency has chosen to outstation eligibility workers at the SSA office. In this case, processing shall be in accordance with § 273.2(k)(1)(ii).

[Amdt. 132, 43 FR 47889, Oct. 17, 1978]

EDITORIAL NOTE: For FEDERAL REGISTER citations affecting § 273.2, see the List of CFR Sections Affected, which appears in the Finding Aids section of the printed volume and on GPO Access.

EFFECTIVE DATE NOTE: By Amdt. 389, 65 FR 41775, July 6, 2000, § 273.2 was amended by adding paragraph (b)(4). At 65 FR 47587, Aug. 2, 2000, the effective date of this amendment was corrected to Aug. 1, 2001. For the convenience of the user, the added text is set forth as follows:

§ 273.2 Application processing.

* * * * *

(b) *Food Stamp application form.* * * *

(4) *Privacy Act statement.* As a State agency, you must notify all households applying and being recertified for food stamp benefits of the following:

(i) The collection of this information, including the social security number (SSN) of each household member, is authorized under the Food Stamp Act of 1977, as amended, 7 U.S.C. 2011-2036. The information will be