



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

ROY COOPER • Governor

KODY H. KINSLEY • Secretary

YVONNE COPELAND • Director, Division of Child and Family Well
Being

Date: October 28, 2024

Dear County Directors of Social Services

Attention: Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Income Maintenance Caseworkers, Managers and Supervisors

Subject: **Amended** Hurricane Helene – Automated Mass Replacements for FNS and SUN Bucks Recipients

Priority: Information and Action

I. GENERAL PROCEDURES

NCDHHS was notified by The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that Mecklenburg County was denied for mass replacements due to insufficient data for power outages and flooding. Households will need to complete a DSS-1678-Replacement Affidavit to report food loss.

On September 26, 2024, Hurricane Helene caused severe flooding and power outages in the western part of North Carolina. To assist current Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) recipients adversely impacted by this disaster, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) requested a federal waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide automated, mass replacement of FNS benefits, without requiring households to report loss of food or provide verification of the loss. Counties where 50% of the entire population experienced power outages of four or more hours due to Hurricane Helene are eligible for this waiver. The waiver will allow for more timely and efficient replacement of FNS benefits via an automated process.

The following counties were approved by the USDA for automated mass replacements for both FNS and SUN Bucks recipients: **Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties.**

The request for automated mass replacements for the following counties was denied by the USDA: **Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Mecklenburg and Swain.** The USDA

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denied the request indicating there was insufficient data to demonstrate that over 50% of the households in these counties suffered either structural damage causing food loss or a power outage of over 4 hours in length (assumed to cause food loss).

II. MASS REPLACEMENT ISSUANCE

- A. The USDA derives a benefit replacement estimate by assuming a reasonable usage of benefits and consumption of food over the course of the month and estimates how much food may have been lost by the average household. This estimate considers whether loss is limited to perishables due to a power outage, or perishables and non-perishables due to structural or flood damage.
- B. North Carolina provided USDA with available documentation of power outages for the counties impacted by Hurricane Helene. USDA approved for the State to automatically replace 70% of the FNS benefits issued on or before September 25, 2024, in the approved counties listed above. NCDHHS issued automated, mass replacements for FNS households in the approved counties on Sunday, October 6, 2024.
- C. Current FNS recipients may request an additional manual replacement by their county department of social services (DSS) agency for the remaining 30% of their September allotment if the FNS household reports that their food loss exceeded the 70% mass replacement amount. County DSS agencies cannot issue manual replacements that exceed 100% the client's monthly allotment.
- D. On October 7, USDA approved NCDHHS to issue automated mass replacements for SUN Bucks (or Summer EBT) recipients who received benefits in September 2024 and live in one of the approved 23 counties listed above. NCDHHS has not yet issued the automated mass replacements for SUN Bucks recipients but will inform county DSS when this has occurred. In the meantime, county DSS agencies can issue manual replacements for SUN Bucks recipients.

Examples:

1. The FNS household of 7 receives a monthly FNS allotment of \$500.00. Through the automated mass replacement on October 6, 2024, the household received 70% of their monthly allotment, or \$350. If the household believes that they lost \$500 worth of food purchased with their FNS benefits in September, the household can ask their county DSS for a manual replacement for the difference between their monthly allotment and the mass replacement amount (e.g., \$150). The county DSS should manually replace the \$150.
2. The FNS household of 7 receives a monthly FNS allotment of \$500.00. The household requested a manual replacement of \$100 from the county DSS. The county completed the manual replacement. The FNS household was not picked up for automated mass replacement by NCFASST because they already received manual replacement prior to the mass replacement. The FNS household returns to

the county DSS and indicates they did not receive the entire 70%. The county DSS can manually replace the difference between what the household would have received through mass replacements (70% of the benefit) and what they actually received through a manual replacement. In this example, the county can manually replace \$250.

Note: The household size will not include ineligible and disqualified members. Ineligible and disqualified members are eligible to apply for D-SNAP.

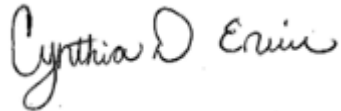
III. IMPLEMENTATION INSTRUCTIONS

Counties must key all completed manual affidavits received prior to close of business on October 31, 2024. NC FAST will disable these selections, and manual replacements will not be keyed after October 31, 2024.

Guidance will be provided at a later date regarding the automated mass supplements to bring households to the maximum allowable allotment for FNS recipient households in all Individual Assistance Counties listed above.

If you have any questions, please submit them to the Continuous Quality Improvement Specialist (CQIS) dss.policy.questions@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,



CE/vb

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