



## **Immigrant Eligibility - Verification of Work History**

**June 23, 1997**

**To:** Food Stamp Program Directors All Regions

This memorandum gives further guidance on obtaining information from the Social Security Administration (SSA) on immigrants' work history to determine if they have 40 qualifying quarters of work in the United States, and for handling situations where States have not yet established links with the SSA computer system.

In correspondence dated October 18, 1996, February 25, 1997 and April 14, 1997, we indicated that authorized use of the certification pending verification (CPV) procedures described in the October 18 memorandum would end on June 1, 1997. Our memorandum dated May 14, 1997 extended the date to June 30. We expected that by then most State agencies would be able to verify an immigrant's work history through the Quarters of Coverage History System (QCHS) developed by the Social Security Administration (SSA) for the use of States.

State agencies that do not obtain quarters of work information from SSA will have to obtain verification from applicants. This will place an additional burden on applicants, who must locate and provide sufficient work documentation; on eligibility workers, who must review the information; and on SSA, which may be contacted by the applicant as a source of documentation.

Some clients may present an SSA Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement (PEBES) as documentation. While these statements may help make the determinations, they were not designed for this purpose and they do not contain sufficiently detailed information to make this decision for anyone other than a client who has at least 40 qualifying quarters on his or her own record before January 1, 1997. Further, the PEBES will not indicate receipt of Supplemental Security Income.

FNS is concerned about determining immigrant eligibility for food stamps in compliance with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) as quickly and efficiently as possible, with the least burden on SSA, eligibility workers and applicants. We expect that most States will be able to access the QCHS before the end August. Only a few States have not made QCHS implementation a priority or committed to a definite implementation date.

State agencies that have not taken steps to access the QCHS could contract with States that do have access to submit requests and receive data for them. We encourage State agencies to share the software needed to access the QCHS and assist other State agencies in requesting and obtaining employment data whenever possible.

To accommodate SSA's concerns, reduce the verification burden, and ensure that State agencies that have made a good-faith effort to implement QCHS are not adversely affected, we are providing the following guidance:

1. State agencies that have already begun the implementation process (beyond signing the modified exchange agreement with SSA) may continue CPV procedures until August 22, 1997. However, the eligibility of each individual certified under CPV provisions after June 30, 1997 shall be verified no later than 3 months after the first full month of the CPV certification.\* According to information from FNS and SSA regional offices, the State agencies that have not begun the process of accessing QCHS are: New Hampshire, West Virginia, Ohio, North Dakota, Iowa, and Hawaii. We will extend CPV authorization to any of these States that provides documentation of steps taken as of July 1 to access QCHS. We request that the appropriate regional offices send letters to these States as soon as possible notifying them that continued use of CPV procedures after June 30, 1997 is not authorized and that they have the opportunity to provide evidence that they initiated action prior to July 1 to implement QCHS by a specified date. Please let us know immediately if you believe one of these States has begun the process or if other States have not.

2. Household members who attempt to obtain verification of their work history should not be penalized because of an unavoidable delay in obtaining information from SSA or other third parties. Therefore, if the State agency is at fault for not obtaining information from SSA and eligibility cannot be determined within the first 30 days after application, benefits shall be provided to eligible households from the date of application, in accordance with 7 CFR 273.2(h)(3).

Please let us know if you have any questions.

/S/

Arthur T. Foley  
Director  
Program Development Division

\* This means 3 months after the month of application. This clarification has since been sent in an e-mail message to the regional offices.