

Recommendations from HRTF subcommittee looking at customer service, dignity and respect issues arising from Oregon Action's April 2001 Report:

1. Simplify and accelerate the application process.

Significant improvement in simplification of the food stamp application form has occurred, but we remain concerned about numerous anecdotal reports from applicants of increased intake requirements, including widespread agency pending of benefits due to requests for excessive and unnecessary verification.

Recommendations include:

- Simplify the intake process by only requiring applicants to provide a minimum of verification. Make full use of existing documentation to accelerate the process.
- Provide ongoing, mandatory training for all line staff on streamlining the application/intake process. Follow up with individual staff members who continue to misunderstand changes such as categorical eligibility.
- Explore creating a process of worker peer review of cases to reduce errors, ensure uniform understanding of streamlined procedure, and improve customer service relations. This process would need to be created in a way that does not increase workload and ideally would streamline and eliminate demands on individual caseworkers.
- Simplify re-certification forms to align with the length of the new application.

2. Provide expedited services for applicants in crisis as required by federal law.

DHS has improved screening for expedited food stamps, and improved the worker training guide in this area. DHS has also just developed a new screening tool for domestic violence (DV); however, we remain concerned about continued anecdotal reports of applicants not being adequately screened for both expedited food stamps and domestic violence services.

Recommendations include:

- Provide intensified training for reception staff to increase sensitivity to emergency and DV issues.
- Have lead workers available in the reception area to provide informational support to reception staff.
- Implement screening tools that actively and effectively identify emergency and domestic violence issues.

3. Treat applicants with dignity and respect.

The April 2001 Oregon Action report noted improvement in respectful treatment of applicants, particularly by front desk staff; however, concern remains over continued anecdotal reports of negative worker/client interactions, and we believe DHS needs to remain ever vigilant concerning positive treatment of applicants, particularly those who are non-English speaking.

Recommendations include:

- Intensify progressive discipline actions to reassign or remove dysfunctional workers.
- Intensify and make mandatory customer service training for all staff.
- Provide worker incentives for improved customer service focus, such as "worker of the month" gift certificates, etc.

