



Department of Human Services  
311 West Saratoga Street  
Baltimore MD 21201

## FIA ACTION TRANSMITTAL

**Control Number: #21-05**

**Effective Date: Immediately**

**Issuance Date: July 31, 2020**

**TO: DIRECTORS, LOCAL DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
DEPUTY/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS FOR FAMILY INVESTMENT  
FAMILY INVESTMENT SUPERVISORS AND ELIGIBILITY STAFF**

**FROM: NETSANET KIBRET, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** 

**RE: USING TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS AS THE PREFERRED INTERVIEW  
METHOD**

**PROGRAMS AFFECTED: SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
(SNAP), TEMPORARY CASH ASSISTANCE (TCA),  
REFUGEE CASH ASSISTANCE (RCA) AND TEMPORARY  
DISABILITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TDAP)**

**ORIGINATING OFFICE: OFFICE OF OPERATIONS**

### **SUMMARY:**

The Department of Human Services (DHS) recognizes the concerns the nation is facing about the impact of the “Coronavirus (COVID-19)” and, in response, has taken a number of steps to help keep all members of the DHS family safe and healthy while limiting any impact to our ability to serve. we require all Local Department of Social Services to utilize telephone interviews as the preferred method of interviews. Face to Face interviews will only be conducted by the customers request.

This action transmittal provides brief information on how local departments can use the telephone as the preferred method of interviewing. It also provides information about the CARES migration that will support telephone interviewing.

### **REQUIRED ACTION:**

Reference AT: 11-02, effective June 29, 2010. . Face-to-face interviews were no longer required at application and redetermination for Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP), Public Assistance to Adults (PAA), Burial Assistance (BA) and Medical Assistance (MA). In addition, a face to face interview is not required for Welfare Avoidance Grants or Emergency Assistance to Families with Children (EAFC). Local departments must revise their local plans if they contain a requirement for a face to face interview.

If an applicant for any program requests a face-to-face interview, you must comply with this request and schedule one to take place as quickly as possible.

## **TELEPHONE INTERVIEWING TIPS**

An interview, whether face-to-face or by telephone, is a structured communication for the purpose of gathering necessary customer information to assist in determining eligibility. Its success depends on the skill of the interviewer and the rapport that develops between the interviewer and the customer.

### **Telephone Interviews Establishment of Rapport**

- Identify yourself before asking for the customer
  - Ex: “Hello this Janice Smith calling from the State of MD Department of Social Services calling for John Greene regarding a public assistance application. May I speak with John Greene.”
- Provide your direct contact information
  - Ex: Can you grab a pen and piece of paper to write down my contact information? My name is \_\_\_\_\_ my telephone number at the office is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Authenticate the applicant in a collaborative manner. Three different examples are listed below.
  - Ex: I have your address on State Street in Baltimore, MD. Can you provide me the street number and zip code?
  - Ex: I see you were born on August 26th can you provide me the year?
  - Ex: Perfect! I just need you to provide me with just the last four digits of your SSN so we can proceed on with the interview.
- Keep in mind identity theft is real therefore people may question you. Provide the option to call your work number and leave a voice message with the best date and time for you to call them back if they do not feel comfortable proceeding with the interview at the time. Be sure to narrate your efforts.

When leaving a voice message be sure to leave your direct contact information. Speak clearly and be sure to repeat your work telephone number twice.

## Telephone Interview Structured Communication

- I. Plan the telephone interview. It requires preparation.
  - A. Get organized
  - B. Decide the objective of the call
    1. What is it you need to know?
    2. Why are you calling the customer?
  - C. Familiarize yourself with relevant past and current information
  - D. Write down all information needed
  - E. Gather complete and accurate information
- II. During the interview
  - A. Confirm your understanding of the circumstances
    1. Ask questions until you are clear on all issues,
    2. Request that the customer repeat them back to you.
- III. Use a good closing statement to prevent unnecessary and time-consuming phone calls to and from customers.

**Examples:** “Is there anything else you need to tell me before we hang up?”  
“Do you have any questions for me?”  
“Do you know what information you need to send/bring in?”  
“Do you understand all that we talked about?”

### **CARES ACTION REQUIRED:**

It is important that CARES is properly coded to capture when the interview is completed by phone.

- The CARES **MISC** screen was modified as follows:
  - Telephone Interview and Date field
    - For intake and redetermination interviews conducted by telephone, enter a **Y** in the **Telephone Interview** field and the date the telephone interview was conducted.
  - Valid value of T (telephone interview) for the Redetermination Method
    - Enter **T** in the **Redet Method** field if the next scheduled redetermination can be completed via a telephone interview.
    - After the redet is completed, if it is a simplified reporting case the **T** Redet Method will be “flipped” by CARES to an **M** (mail in) for the next redetermination appointment.
  - Appointment Type Field- **Interview Method**
    - Enter a **T** in this field to indicate the appointment is for a telephone interview.

- The **SCDI** (Screening Disposition) and **SCHD** (Daily Schedule) screens were modified to capture an **Interview Method** of **T** (telephone interview).
- The Redetermination and Intake Appointment Notices have been modified to indicate when a telephone interview has been scheduled.

**NOTE:** If a telephonic interview is conducted the next interview method should be “M” (mail in)

**INQUIRIES:** Please direct policy questions to FIA Policy by completing the FIA Policy Information Request Form found on Knowledge Base as shown in the screenshot below or email to [fia.policy@maryland.gov](mailto:fia.policy@maryland.gov).

The screenshot shows the DHS Knowledge Base interface. The top navigation bar includes 'Administrations', 'Tools', 'Resources', 'Links', and 'Local Offices'. A search bar is present. The left sidebar lists various categories, with 'Contact us with your FIA Program Eligibility Policy Question' highlighted. The main content area is titled 'Family Investment Administration' and contains descriptive text about public assistance programs. Two data boxes display job placement statistics for FFY 2017. The right sidebar provides contact information for two staff members.

- c:     DHS Executive Staff  
        Constituent Services  
        DHS Help Desk  
        FIA Management Staff