

**DSS ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER NO. ECONOMIC AND FAMILY SERVICES
Work First EFS_WF_AL-4-2019**

TO: County Directors of Social Services

ATTENTION: Work First Program Managers and Supervisors

DATE: November 18, 2019

SUBJECT: 2020 Cost-of-Living-Adjustments (COLA) Mass Change in Social Security Administration (SSA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Veterans Affairs (VA) Payment Amounts

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2020

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The purpose of this letter is to outline the procedures for implementing the 2020 Cost-of-Living Assistance (COLA) increases for Work First (WF) Cash Assistance cases.

- SSA payment amounts (1.6% increase)
- SSI payment amounts (1.6% increase) and
- VA payment amounts (1.6% increase)

The 2020 COLA increase will be automatically applied to Work First Cash Assistance cases via North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST) automated case management system. These changes will affect the January 2020 Work First Cash benefits.

II. POLICY PROCEDURES

- A. SSA and VA benefits are countable income; therefore, included in budget calculations. **Individuals who receive SSI are not included in the Work First case; therefore, the SSI income is not included in the budget calculation.**
- B. All programs will be impacted by the COLA increase. As a result, additional case observation and attention is needed to ensure the correct benefit amounts are issued.
- C. Work First recipients will not receive a mass notice about the COLA changes. Notices must be provided to Work First recipients if their benefits change or terminate as a result of the COLA increase. Work First caseworkers are responsible for sending the ten (10) day timely/adequate notice (as appropriate) to affected recipients.

III. IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

- A. NC FAST will take the following actions:

1. Apply the COLA increase to all Work First cash assistance cases and update the Benefit Evidence effective December 31, 2019.
 2. Show both the 2019 and 2020 benefit amounts.
 3. Provide a report of the impacted cases and post the report to FAST Help.
 4. Issue a communication to inform caseworkers when the report is available.
- B. The caseworker must manually reassess impacted cases, as identified on the report, to review the new eligibility determination – the “ON HOLD DECISION.” Review and accept changed decisions if the new eligibility determination is correct per program policy.

1. Actions to Take on Applications

For pending applications taken prior to January 1, 2020, the caseworker must end date the “old” SSA and VA payment amounts with an end date of December 31, 2019 and add the new amount with the start date of January 1, 2020.

Caseworker must key the COLA benefit information using the correct amount for benefits.

2. Actions to Take on Active Cases

For active cases which have already been processed, NC FAST will run a batch that will end date the “old” amount December 30, 2019 and add the new amount with the start date of December 31, 2019 effective for January 1, 2020.

3. Actions to Take on Cases Deemed Ineligible

For cases deemed ineligible in error due to the new COLA income, the caseworker must determine the correct SSA and/or VA benefit(s) payment amount(s). Update the Benefit Evidence for January 2020 in NC FAST.

IV. EFFECTIVE DATE

This policy is effective January 1, 2020. Please email any questions regarding this policy to the Economic and Family Services Operational Support Team (OST) at DSS.Policy.Questions@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,



David Locklear, Deputy Director
Economic and Family Services

DL/wf