

**DSS ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER NO. ECONOMIC AND FAMILY SERVICES 10-2018  
(Work First)**

**TO:** COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**ATTENTION:** Work First Program Managers and Supervisors

**DATE:** November 30, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Social Security, Supplemental Security Income and Veteran's Benefits Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** January 1, 2019

**I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

Effective January 1, 2019, recipients of Social Security (SSA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Veteran's Benefits (VA) will receive a **2.8%** Cost-of-Living Assistance (COLA) increase. The purpose of this letter is to outline procedures for implementing COLA increases for Work First (WF) cash assistance cases. The 2019 COLA increase will be automatically applied to cash assistance cases via North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST), automated case management system. These changes will affect the January 2019 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. As a result, additional case observation and attention is needed.
- C.** Work First recipients will not receive a mass notice about the COLA. 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, 2018.
  - 2. Show both the 2018 and 2019 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 and review the new eligibility determination – the “ON HOLD DECISION.” Review and accept changed decisions if determination is correct per program policy.

**1. Actions Taken Prior to January 1, 2019**

For pending applications, the caseworker must end date the “old” SSA, SSI and VA payment amounts with an end date of December 31, 2018 and add new amount with the start date of January 1, 2019.

For active cases already processed, NC FAST will run a batch that will end date the “old” amount December 30, 2018 and add the new amount with the start date of December 31, 2018 effective for January 1, 2019.

**2. Actions to Take on/or After January 1, 2019**

Caseworker must complete/key the COLA benefit information using the appropriate/correct/new amounts for benefits and send the appropriate notice.

**3. Actions on Ineligible Cases**

Ineligible cases in NC FAST will be updated. If the case was deemed ineligible in error, the caseworker must determine the correct SSA and/or VA benefit(s) payment amount(s). Update the Benefit Evidence for January 2019 in NC FAST and send the appropriate notice.

**IV. EFFECTIVE DATE**

This policy is effective January 1, 2019. Please email any questions regarding this policy to the Economic and Family Services Operational Support Team (OST) at [DSS.Policy.Questions@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:DSS.Policy.Questions@dhhs.nc.gov).

Sincerely,



David Locklear, Deputy Director  
Economic and Family Services