

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

DIVISION OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

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FAMILY NUTRITION PROGRAMS

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Debra Whitford

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Food and Nutrition Service, USDA

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RE: Comments on the New WIC Food Rule

The implementation of the New WIC Food Package brings exciting changes. We have heard favorable remarks from participants and local WIC staff about the addition of low fat foods, variety of grains, and the inclusion of fruits and vegetables. The new food rule aligns with our nutrition education and breastfeeding messages and addresses cultural food preferences. There are additional revisions that could further reduce participation barriers and expand efforts to address cultural and personal food preferences.

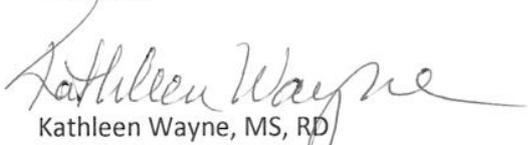
The Alaska WIC Program Office recommends the following:

- 1. Waive the requirement of medical documentation for children to receive soy beverages and tofu.** The current rule creates a barrier to WIC services and sets precedence for unfair treatment. WIC clients may choose to consume soy beverages and tofu because of cultural or personal preference. Requiring medical documentation creates the following burdens:
 - Additional cost and time to program participants to seek documentation from their healthcare provider,
 - Increased burden on doctors to complete forms,
 - Increased monitoring requirements for state and local agency staff
 - Does not acknowledge cultural and personal preferences
- 2. Waive the requirement for medical documentation for children and women to receive additional cheese in lieu of whole fat milk substituted for low fat milk.** The current rule is a barrier to WIC services for children and women. This rule places additional burden on physicians and local WIC agencies to process and monitor the required forms.

- 3. Implement cash value vouchers only for infants 10 months and older.** Waiting to introduce new food textures is developmentally appropriate when an infant is 10 months or older. This delay reduces the burden to parents and caregivers to prepare the foods for a six month old to eat. This revision reduces the risk of other family members eating the fruits and vegetables meant for infants.

With these additional revisions, WIC participants can choose foods based on their personal tastes, preferences, and cultural practices. Thank you for considering these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Wayne, MS, RD
WIC Program Manager