

P-2270 Temporary Absence (Reach Up rule 2230.3)(B23-08)

Reach Up benefits can continue for a household if temporary absence is granted by the department. The absence must be more than 30 days, but not expected to last more than 180 days. Reunification must be the goal.

Absence of Parent/Caretaker:

- inpatient or outpatient care from a hospital,
- substance abuse treatment facility,
- other medical treatment institution.

Absence of Child:

- custody of Family Services Division (FSD);
- receiving care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility, or other medical institution;
- child is incarcerated;
- voluntary agreement to place the child in someone else's care; or
- substantially similar circumstances

Example of a voluntary placement:

Mom has been experiencing an increase in mental health symptoms and is considering checking into Brattleboro Retreat for a period of time. Mom is supported by her mental health clinician and her primary care provider. Family Services is not involved. Provider(s) writes letter of support stating that it is in Mom and child's best interest, the child be separated from Mom and returned within 180 days. Child can stay temporarily with maternal grandmother, but Mom continues to need financial assistance so she can maintain her apartment. Case may be eligible for Temporary Absence.

Shared or Conditional Custody

Shared custody and Conditional Custody Orders (CCO) do not require Temporary Absence unless the child(ren) is out of the home more than 50% of the time.

Homelessness

Participants separated because of homelessness may be eligible for Temporary absence if the goal is to reunify within 180 days.

Reporting Temporary Absence

The participant is responsible for reporting all changes in their household, but if reported by Family Services Division (FSD), Economic Services must act on the information.

Family Services can either provide:

- form [FS 201 FC-M](#) indicating if household is receiving Reach Up
- an email to ESD stating that a child(ren) was removed and that the current case plan includes reunification

If the participant tells their case manager about the absence and it is not already reported, the case manager must let Eligibility know.

Assumption of continued benefits

It can be assumed that participants will want their Reach Up benefit continued. If participants decide they do not want Temporary Absence, voluntary withdrawal will be entered as soon as possible.

Temporary Absence not reported

If a temporary absence is not reported and Reach Up benefits have been ongoing, use the actual left date to determine how much of the 180 days remains.

Determining Eligibility

Reunification within 180 days must be the goal to be eligible for temporary absence.

A Waiver of Confidentiality (form [201WC](#)) is not necessary to approve the temporary absence but can be requested to help coordinate the case. If a case manager is assigned, the case manager can obtain a release after temporary absence is granted.

District Management Teams will decide who is responsible for determining temporary absence eligibility in their own office.

Benefits Programs Specialist (BPS) gives all information to their District Management Team designee to make the decision if the grant will remain open, needs to be closed, or should be approved or denied.

New Reach Up applicants

New Reach Up applicants, and current participants adding an absent child that is not already on the Reach Up grant, can also apply/add the child to grant requesting temporary absence eligibility. Look at the date of the first Reach Up benefit as the start of the 180-day period.

Multiple Temp Absences in same household

If a household has more than one child, and the children are removed from the household on different dates, it is possible to grant multiple temp absences for the same family. Determine the 180-day period per child.

FSD related cases

The most common Temporary Absence cases involve FSD custody. In these cases, unless clearly indicated on a received [FS 201 FC-M](#) contact should be made with the local FSD office to ensure that the current plan includes reunification. District offices may have different methods for making this contact and may include District Management, Eligibility or Case Management staff.

- If child is placed in out of state care but the plan is to reunify the child with their family in Vermont, the household may be eligible for temporary absence. This is true even if another state has custody of the child.

The FSD social worker assigned to the family, the parent/caretaker's Reach Up case manager, and Eligibility will work together to assist the family.

In cases of a child only Reach Up grant, case management will not be set up and communication will remain between FSD and the District Management Team. Request that FSD inform the management team if the court order goal no longer includes reunification. Management should reach out to FSD the month prior to the temporary absent ending to receive an update.

Non-FSD related case

Accept the participant's statement regarding their plan for reunifying. If it is questionable ask the participant to provide statements from others who are familiar with the families' circumstances.

Granting Temporary Absence

CATN all information in ACCESS. Enter a WARN and set up a future TODO that indicates when the maximum of 180 days will be reached.

The absent household member will remain active for Reach Up. The absent household member must be removed for 3SVT and Supplemental Fuel. The full Reach Up grant that the household is receiving must be counted for 3SVT and Supplemental Fuel.

If a case manager is assigned, inform them of the following:

- If the absence is expected to last more than 180 days.
- Any change to the parent/caretaker's plan for the child to return home at the end of the absence, or for the parent to return home.
- Indications or reports that it is no longer the parent/caretaker's intent to maintain a home or be responsible for the child during the absence.
- Changes in the parent/caretaker's living situation.
- Information regarding the child's incarceration, medical care, or DCF custody status, or the parent/caretaker's inpatient or outpatient care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility or other medical institution.
- Changes affecting the parent/caretaker's eligibility for Reach Up.
- Changes in the designated responsible adult (caretaker) and alternate payee if applicable.

Temporary Absence of Parent/Caretaker

If the parent/caretaker is the one that is absent from the home, they must assign a protective payee and complete a Protective Payment Agreement (form [207](#)) otherwise, the benefit will close. The parent who is temporarily absent should not retain access to benefits.

If housing costs are included in the Reach Up budget, vendor payments will be set up. Housing includes rent, mortgage, property taxes, insurance, allowable maintenance and repair.

A protective payee may apply for 3SVT and Supplemental Fuel for themselves and the child(ren) if income eligible. They should not gain access to the temporarily absent parent/caretaker's 3SVT or Supplemental Fuel benefit. If the protective payee is also caring for the child(ren) outside of the child(ren)'s typical house they may also be eligible for a caretaker benefit.

Caretaker Grant for Child(ren) (if applicable)

A caretaker may receive a child only Reach Up benefit at the same time that a parent is receiving a temporary absence benefit.

Extending Temporary Absence

Temporary Absence extensions are determined on an individual basis. Not all cases will need to request an extension. An extension should only be requested

if the participant or case manager/service provider feels additional time will help the family to be reunited and reunification is anticipated to occur in the next several months. The request for the extension should be requested the month prior to the 180th day.

If there is a Reach Up case manager working with the family, they will be working with FSD and will be responsible for requesting the extension. See Reach Services procedures [Temporary Absence P2355.docx](#)

To request an extension, for a household that doesn't have a Reach Up case manager assigned the below questions need to be completed by the FSD worker and the eligibility worker. Responses need to be emailed to RUFA AOPS. AHS.DCFESDCOReachUp@vermont.gov

Questions for eligibility to complete.

1. What is the original expiration date of the 180-day temporary absence?
2. Has AOPS already granted an extension?
3. Is there any information related to the family's housing that should be noted (are they in a GA hotel, waiting for a voucher, etc.)?

Question for Family Service Worker to complete:

1. Is the case plan goal still reunification? If yes, when is FSD recommending the child(ren) return home 50% of the time or full time?
2. Has reunification been delayed due to a circumstance beyond the parent(s) control or a catastrophic event? (Please be as specific as possible)
3. Has the parent(s) been consistently engaged with FSD and making progress on case plan goals?
4. Are unsupervised visits occurring? If so, where, and how often? If not, is there a plan for this to happen in the next 30 days?
5. Are unsupervised overnights occurring? If so, what is the plan? If not, is there a plan for this to happen in the next 30 days?

Ending Temporary Absence

If an FSD custody case and FSD reports to Economic Services at any point that the court approved plan for the family no longer includes reunification as a goal prior to the 180th day, the BPS reports this to the District Management Team designee who will send an email to RUFA AOPS

AHS.SCFESDOReachUp@vermont.gov change for review of the household.

Cases that are closing prior to the 180th day for other eligibility related reasons should be treated as any ongoing Reach Up household.

Cases which are not reunited within 180s days should be closed as soon as possible after the 180th day.

Continuation or Reopening Under Temporary Absence

Case closes for Eligibility related reasons (non-coop, over income, etc.)

If verification or new information comes in before the closure date, the household would be reopened with no changes to the temporary absence eligibility.

If verification or new information comes in after the closure date, the participant must reapply. Use the date of the first Reach Up benefit as a starting point for the remaining time period:

- If the child(ren) will return to the household within 30 days case can be approved.
- If the child(ren) will not return to the household within 30 days, BPS or Case Manager should determine if the goal is still reunification. Consider how much of the 180 temporary absence period the household has already utilized.

Example: A household was approved and had been on Reach Up for 120 days under temporary absence eligibility before closing for not returning an Interim Report. If they reapply the next month, subtract 120 from 180 days to determine the time frame for when the child must return to the home (180 – 120 = 60 days remaining of temporary absence eligibility).

Case Closed in Error

If we close a temporary absence case in error offer the household an underpayment for the months, they were closed in error or extend the 180 days.

Example: A household was closed for not returning the non-mandatory 201WC form. Contact the household to see if they would like to have an underpayment issued or have their case reopened and 180-day time frame extended.

Sanctioned cases

If reopened case is about to be sanctioned—make sure to allow 10 days for household to receive notice of reduced sanction amount (sanction may need to be put in place for following month depending when case is reopened).

BPS Support

The 180 Day Temporary Absence Calculator can be found on the RUFA tab of the [ESD Calculator](#).

District Temporary Absence spreadsheets are located on the Share Drive at the following location: Y:\AHS ALL SHARE\ESD\Temp Absence. District Management Teams will determine who is responsible for entering information into the spreadsheet on a regular basis. RUCO periodically compiles the information for data collection purposes.

Temporary Absence of Child(ren)

Enter left date on the child(ren)'s MEMB panel in ACCESS with code 6 "allowable for RU." Left date will be the first day that the child is consecutively absent, or the first day that the child is consecutively not in the household 50% of the time or more.

Entering code 6 on the MEMB panel will remove child(ren) from the 3SVT and SF budgets Approve the changes in 3SVT and SF ELIG.

Enter a UNEA panel countable for 3SVT and SF just for the portion of the Reach Up grant that isn't being counted and write "RU Temp Absence" in the description field.

Example: Reach Up benefit is \$640. The 3SVT and SF budget is only counting \$426.70 (because of the person being removed for RUFA). A UNEA panel needs to be created for \$213.30 (\$640-426.70).

Temporary Absence of Parent/Caretaker

In two parent households, enter a left date on the parent's MEMB panel in ACCESS with code 6 "allowable for RU". Left date will be the first day that the parent is consecutively absent. Follow instructions above to count full RUFA grant amount in 3SVT and SF budgets.

For single parent households, enter a left date on the parent's MEMB panel in ACCESS with a code 6 "allowable for RU" and approve closure of 3SVT and SF benefits, unless parent is maintaining eligibility on their own. If parent is remaining active on 3SVT or SF, a left date on the child(ren)'s MEMB panel with a code 6.

Setting up Protective Payee

See SOP 2104 Entering an Alternate Payee in ACCESS/Processing a 139AP form and follow directions with information from form 207 Protective Payment Agreement.

When selecting EBT Alternate Payee Status select 1C "Cash Only First Alternate"

Setting up Child Only Caretaker Grant

Use the caretaker's real SSN if they are not already or have never received Reach Up for themselves, and they do not have their own children in the household. Otherwise follow District process to obtain a temporary SSN for the caretaker.

Follow District process to obtain a temporary SSN for the child(ren). Keep all other information the same. Indicate "no" when ACCESS asks if this child(ren) is really the other child(ren) in temporary absence household. Do not merge SSNs.

Create WARN and enter CATN that this child(ren) is also open in temporary absence household.

When closing child only caretaker benefit, **contact COPS** if a temporary SSN was used so COPS can merge the cases.

Ending Temporary Absence

If household is reunified within 180 days:

- Remove the left date and code 6 on the MEMB panel
- Remove the UNEA panel for "RU Temp Absence"
- Add the child(ren) back to 3SVT/SF household effective the date of return (if applicable)
- Remove the temporary absence WARN
- Enter CATN indicating child(ren)'s name and date of return
- Contact COPS if a temporary SSN was used in a Child Only Caretaker benefit and COPS will merge the SSNs as needed
- If a protective payee was assigned follow the directions for "Removing or Making Changes to an Existing Alternate Payee" in the [SOP 2104](#).

Transferring a temporary absence case to a different district

When a household that is currently granted temporary absence moves to a different district:

- Make sure the WARN clearly states when the temporary absence started and when it will expire, as well as if any extensions have been granted.
- V off the future TODO for the current district and create a future TODO for the new district.
- Update the current district Temporary Absence spreadsheet indicating the household moved to which specific district.
- Send an email to the new district's management team so they can the household to their Temporary Absence Spreadsheet.