

Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc. ®



We provide free legal aid to people with civil legal problems in western New York.

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COVID-19 and the Department of Social Services

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Is the Department of Social Services (DSS) still open?

Yes, local DSS offices are still open and are operating with reduced staff. However, most DSS offices are asking people not to come into their buildings unless it is absolutely necessary.

Will I be able to speak to my caseworker?

As DSS offices are operating with reduced staffing levels your regular caseworker may not be available, however DSS must have a worker available that can assist you.

How do I apply for Temporary Assistance?

You can find the application online at <http://otda.ny.gov/programs/applications/2921-DD.pdf> and print and return it to DSS. You can also pick up an application in person at your local DSS office. Some DSS offices allow you to apply entirely online, but you should check with them first before trying to do so.

Most interviews will be done by phone, but you can request an in-person interview.

Do I still have to provide DSS with requested documents?

Yes, you must still provide DSS with requested documents, as they still need to know your income, resources, and other information to determine your eligibility for benefits.

How do I provide DSS with documents if in-person visits are discouraged?

You can mail copies of requested documents to your local DSS. Many DSS offices also have document drop boxes located outside of their buildings where you can securely drop off documents. Call your local DSS office to ask where their drop box is located.

Do not mail originals of vital documents like birth certificates or Social Security cards.

What if I am having trouble obtaining documents DSS requested?

If you cannot obtain requested documents because of COVID-19, you can ask DSS for help in obtaining them.

What other changes have been made in DSS offices due to COVID-19?

The many processes, requirements, and policies that DSS follows have in many cases been modified or reduced. For example, DSS should not be denying or sanctioning you based on items that you may be unable to obtain or actions that you may be unable to take due to COVID-19. If you have a specific question, contact your DSS office.

Do I have to go to my work assignment to continue to receive cash assistance?

No, you do not have to go to any in-person work assignments at this time. However, if your work can be done remotely, then you can be asked to continue your work assignment.

If you cannot continue your work assignment because of COVID-19, you should not be sanctioned.

Do I have to recertify?

SNAP and Temporary Assistance certification have been extended for three months if you were due to recertify in March, April, or May 2020. If you still have questions about whether you need to recertify or not, please contact your caseworker. If your benefits are discontinued during this time, please contact our office.

What if I was serving a sanction before COVID-19?

If you were on a sanction that has completed, you should file a new application for benefits.

How will the Federal Stimulus payment affect my temporary assistance case?

The Federal Stimulus will not count against your benefits, and will not be a resource until after July. If you still have money left over after that, it will then be counted as a resource.

Am I eligible for Emergency Assistance?

Yes, if you have an immediate need such as a utility shutoff or you are without food or shelter, you should apply in person for emergency assistance. If you are denied emergency assistance, please contact our office.

What if I apply for benefits and am denied?

You should ask for a written notice, then contact our office as soon as possible so that we can review your situation.

Can I request a Fair Hearing? If yes, how do I make this request?

Yes, you can request a fair hearing if you disagree with the decision made in your case.

You can request a fair hearing:

By phone: 1-800-342-3334 (toll-free)

By fax: 1-518-473-6735

By mail:

New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)

Office of Administrative Hearings

P.O. Box 1930

Albany, NY 12201-1930

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