



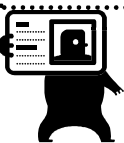
The Welfare Agitator

Welfare Justice Project

DPW VERIFICATION DOCUMENTS - WHY AND WHAT?

SPECIAL POINT OF INTEREST:

While we have been working on getting the DPW to simplify verifications, Republican Senators and Representatives in the PA General Assembly are trying to make the process more cumbersome by forcing DPW to require even more information. We continue to fight this battle on your behalf and will tell you how you can help with this fight. Stay tuned!!!



Anybody who has ever applied for benefits from the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) knows that they require you to verify everything except your blood type. However, what you don't know is that a lot of what they ask you to verify is not really required to determine your eligibility for the program. For a long time, we have been advocating to simplify the verifications. It might be helpful to know what the current requirements actually are. DPW has different requirements for each of its programs. Generally, every household is required to prove or verify certain information about their circumstances, using any of the following sources: (1) written evidence (like a bill or pay stub); (2) collateral contacts (a third party can verify the information you provided); (3) home visits (a caseworker can visit you at your residence if written evidence is not available); and (4) automated sources (DPW can obtain certain information from computer information sources).

The **SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp program)** is a commonly used benefit, so here is an overview of its verification requirements:

- When you apply for SNAP the basic things you must verify are proof of citizenship, identity, residence, earned and unearned income, and social security numbers for everyone in the household.
 - In order to receive helpful deductions from your income you will need to provide some additional verification for your shelter and utility expenses, medical expenses (if you are elderly or disabled), child support paid out, and dependent care costs for a child or disabled adult.
- Once you have been approved you must renew your benefits after 12 months. You will need to verify any changes in your income, in your household composition, in your household expenses and in child support paid out.
- **Some important things to remember are:**
 - If you have provided social security numbers for everyone in your household, you do not need to provide copies of the social security cards.
 - You should not be asked to provide any verification of resources like bank accounts or school financial aid because they no longer count.
 - You do not have to have a state issued photo ID; you can use various forms of identification.
 - If you do not have birth certificates for everyone in your household, the caseworker is obligated to help you obtain proof of your citizenship.

We continue to advocate for simplification of these policies!

"Justice denied anywhere diminishes justice everywhere" - Martin Luther King, Jr.



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PERSONAL MONEY DOESN'T COUNT FOR NEW SPECIAL ALLOWANCE POLICY



In our last newsletter, we discussed new restrictions that DPW was making in their Special Allowance Program. Here are some clarifications of the changes.

A DPW caseworker is required to be sure that there are no "available resources" you can use before they issue a special allowance. **Available Resource** is any funds that may be available through a contracted program like EARN, or other community program that assists with transportation, school books, etc. It also refers to service or assistance that is of no cost to you, like a ride from a family member or friend.

"Available resources" **does not include your own money**. Like any money you have in a savings account, checking account, or any other account. School financial aid should not be considered a resource. However, scholarship money is considered an available

resource. If you choose to use your loan or grant money to purchase books or materials, DPW will not reimburse you. Any income from employment is not to be considered as a resource.

If you have a disability and may be eligible for assistance through OVR, you should not be denied assistance from DPW on that basis. Initial Special allowances should be granted and DPW should work with you to pursue further assistance through OVR.

If you get a "Special Allowance Verification Form" to be completed by your program, school or employer and you run into a problem getting it completed the DPW caseworker will assist by contacting the program, school or employer themselves or using the information and documentation you provide to make the determination themselves. *For confidentiality reasons, caseworkers have been instructed to avoid contacting employers for verification of needs.*

You are now required to get receipts for everything that you pur-

chase with special allowance money, including bus passes. If you can't get a receipt for the pass you can provide a copy of the bus pass as proof. You are required to submit receipts within 14 days of receiving the special allowance. If you don't, DPW will process the special allowance payment as an overpayment and you will have to repay it. If you turn in the receipt late, DPW will cancel the overpayment.

We are working with DPW to make these policies as flexible as possible. If you would like to work on a committee we are organizing to work on this issue, call Rochelle at 412-431-8960. **In the meantime, this is a new process for all of us so if you run into problems give Rochelle a call!**

REMEMBER, YOU CAN STILL CALL THE "CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER" AT 1-877-395-8930 TO MAKE UPDATES OR CHANGES TO YOUR CASE, CHECK THE STATUS OF YOUR APPLICATION, GET GENERAL INFORMATION OR TO REQUEST FORMS AND DOCUMENTS.

WELFARE MAKES CHANGES



The State Office Building has been sold and several of the Allegheny County Welfare offices presently located there will move, as follows:

- The Southern District Office will be moving to the Southside, 2305 E. Carson Street.
- The LIHEAP office will be moving to the Warner Center, 332 Fifth Avenue (2nd and 3rd floors).
- The Executive Offices will be moving to Piatt Place, 301 5th Avenue.

Also two offices in the Kossman Bldg., 400 Stanwix St. are moving:

- The Three Rivers District Office will be moving to the Warner Center on 332 Fifth Avenue.
- The IRED District Office (400 Stanwix St.) will be moving to Piatt Place, 301 5th Avenue .

DPW expects to complete all these moves in January and February. Before going to the LIHEAP Office, you should call 412-562-0330 to check on their location.

**If you are a consumer in one of these offices you should be notified in advance when the office will be officially relocating.*

You can call the Customer Service Center to get up-to-date information, 1-877-395-8930.

Other DPW news is that the Secretary for the State Department of Public Welfare, Estelle Richman, is taking a job with the Obama administration as Chief Operating Officer at HUD. Sec. Richman has been a true asset to consumers and the state; she will be truly missed. Harriet Dichter will replace her. Ms. Dichter, Deputy Secretary of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, expects to be approved soon by the Senate to fill Richman's position.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE MORE LIMITED THAN LAST YEAR'S



Unlike last year, this year's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program's (LIHEAP) cash and crisis component have different start dates. But because of input from advocates, the cash component is open from **November 2, 2009 to March 15, 2010**, a month earlier than DPW had proposed. The income guidelines for both the cash and crisis component are 150% of the poverty level and are as follows:

Household Size	Income limit
1	\$16,245
2	\$21,855
3	\$27,465
4	\$33,075
Each additional person	Add \$5,610

The maximum cash benefit for a household is \$1000 (last year there was no maximum), and the minimum is \$100. You can complete applications on line through COMPASS at www.compass.state.pa.us. You can also mail in your application or drop it off at your welfare office. If you want to do an application and an interview at the same time you must go to the LIHEAP Office in the State Office Bldg. downtown. (see article on pg. 2 about relocation of office).

The LIHEAP **Crisis component is open from January 4, 2010 to March 15, 2010**. The income guidelines are the same as cash component. The maximum

Crisis benefit is \$400 and the minimum is \$25. You can apply for the Crisis benefit over the phone if you have already been approved for the Cash benefit, the number is 412-562-0330 or 1-866-857-7095.

The Dollar Energy Program opened on October 1, 2009 and will run until September 30, 2010 but participating utility companies may close their programs earlier depending on their funding. Contact your utility company to find out if they are participating and how to apply.

GET YOUR TAXES DONE AT JUST HARVEST



Tax season is just around the corner and Just Harvest is providing free tax assistance again this year. We will complete simple federal, state and local tax returns for low-income workers free of charge.

The for-profit tax companies offer fast tax refunds for a high fee. Don't be fooled! They charge a lot of money to get YOUR money just a week or two earlier.

When you electronically file your return at Just Harvest or with any other tax preparer, the IRS can direct deposit your refund into your bank account in 8-14 days. If you do not have a bank account, this year we will be able help you open a debit card account on site to have your tax refund direct-deposited.

Call Just Harvest at 412-431-8964 after January 11th and as soon as you receive all of your w-2s and we will set up an appointment. We will have day, evening and Saturday appointments available to fit within your schedule.

More details about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), who is eligible for free tax help and other free tax sites in Allegheny County can be found at www.eitcpg.org.

Free tax assistance!
for low-income working people

Just Harvest
16 Terminal Way, South Side

January 19 - April 15th

Call, after January 11th, to
schedule an appointment
412-431-8964

STIMULUS PAYMENT FOR LAID-OFF PEOPLE NO LONGER AFFECTS FOOD STAMPS



In our last newsletter we reported that President Obama's stimulus package included an extra \$25 a week for laid-off workers receiving unemployment and that this extra payment counts against any food stamp benefits they may also be receiving.

PA applied for and received a waiver that allows us to disregard the extra stimulus payment for people who receive SNAP (food stamps). The waiver went into effect in November, so people may have gotten a notice about an increase in their food stamp benefit.

If you or anyone you know has been denied food stamps because this extra payment put them over the income limit, **re-apply ASAP because you may now be eligible.**

OTHER NEWS...



INVITE WJP TO DO AN ADVOCACY CLINIC!

THE WELFARE JUSTICE PROJECT IS AVAILABLE TO COME OUT TO YOUR ORGANIZATION AND CONDUCT ADVOCACY CLINICS FOR YOUR STAFF AND/OR PARTICIPANTS. THE CLINICS CAN BE GENERAL INFORMATION OR SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT A PROGRAM OR POLICY.

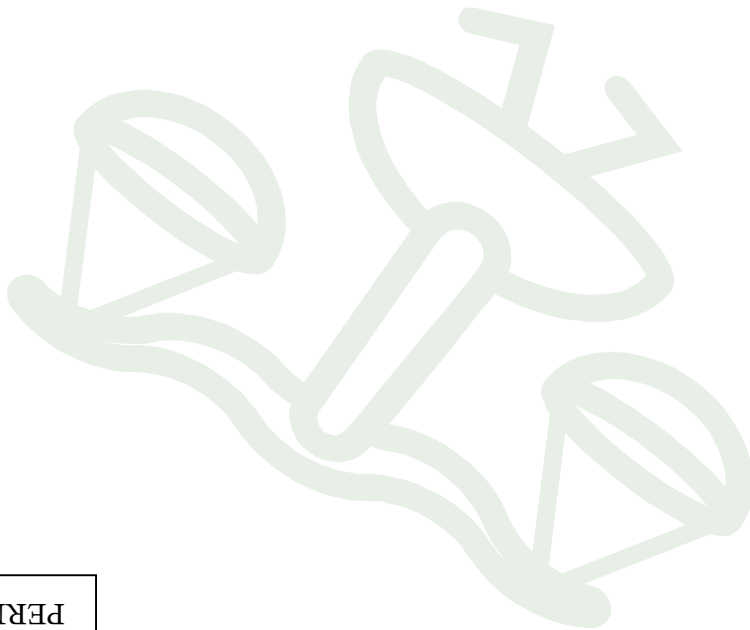
HOURS AND TIMES ARE FLEXIBLE, SO IF YOU ARE INTERESTED **CALL ROCHELLE AT 412-431-8960** TO SET UP A SESSION!

JUST HARVEST PARTNERS WITH THE COMMUNITY VOICEMAIL PROGRAM!

Community Voicemail is a free program of Travelers Aid in which participants receive a free voicemail to use to get messages regarding things like:

- *Employment
- *Education
- *Public Benefits
- *Contacting Family
- *Housing
- *Social Services
- *Health Care
- *Safe Communication

Participants receive a local phone number where people can leave you a voicemail message. You may receive/retrieve your voicemail 24 hours a day. As a partner, Just Harvest can enroll people in the program so if you or anyone you know would benefit from this program, give us a call at 412-431-8960!



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