

CASH ASSISTANCE

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

If you have children and receive Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) cash from the county assistance office there are some things you need to know to protect your interests. (The information in this pamphlet **does not** apply to your medical assistance or food stamp benefits.) If you have any questions about information in this pamphlet call us at **(800) 665-6957, in Erie County call 452-6957.**

TIME LIMITS

- You can only get cash assistance for five (5) years (1825 days) if you are applying for yourself and your child (biological or legally adopted).
- The five-year rule does not apply to you if you are getting cash assistance for a child that is not your biological or legally adopted child, unless you are also getting cash assistance for yourself at the same time.
- Usually, once you use up your five years of eligibility you cannot get cash assistance for yourself or your child unless you can show a hardship or you suffer from a medical disability. **Hardship exceptions are not guaranteed.** Your child could still get cash assistance if he or she began living in the home of another adult who has not used up their eligibility.
- If you get any benefits from the cash assistance program during any month, it will count against your five years of eligibility. For example, even if you only received \$10 or \$20 in cash assistance during a month, that month will count as one month against your five-year time limit. Cooperation with work or child support requirements does not stop the five-year time limit from running.

WORK REQUIREMENTS

- If you get cash assistance, you will probably have to participate in mandatory work activities to keep your benefits. This section describes what you have to do and how to use the work activity requirement to get the education and training you need to get a good job.
- **Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR)**
 - a. **This is a very important document.** In the AMR you set your employment goals and how you plan to achieve them. The assistance office lists the supportive services (child care/transportation etc.) they will give you to help you reach your goal. You must do what the AMR says unless you are voluntarily participating in a work activity. Read the section of this pamphlet about The Agreement of Mutual Responsibility so you get what you need in your AMR. Please note that if your situation changes after you sign your AMR, the regulations of the welfare department state, **"Goals and steps may be modified at any time and the county assistance office may review the client's progress between scheduled redeterminations."**

- When you start getting cash assistance you must do a job search and, if you cannot find a job during that time, you may be required to engage in other work activity. There are a few exceptions to this rule:
 - b. You have a verified physical or mental disability that keeps you from working.
 - c. You are caring for a child under six (6) and do not have child care available.
 - d. You are under 18 and in high school or working on a GED
 - e. You are single and taking care of a child under one (1) year of age. This can only be used for a total of 12 months in your lifetime.

- **Contracted job search.** You go to an agency hired by the assistance office to help you develop the skills to look for and find a job. You must attend classes for a certain number of hours per week based on your household composition. The agency will also supervise your job search. In addition, you must continue looking for a job under the supervision of the agency for up to 90 days after the program ends.

- **Which type of job search should you choose?**
 - f. If you are already in school or a training program or plan to attend a training program, your school hours may count toward your required working hours.
 - g. If you do not have a clear employment goal and little experience in looking for a job, you will be placed in a contracted job search.

- **First 12 months.** You can meet your requirement by participating in one or more of the following activities. A work activity (see 12-24 months below) may also be used to meet this requirement if you are not in school or training. There are no specified number of hours per week you must devote to the activity.
 - i. vocational education
 - ii. general education
 - iii. English as a second language training
 - iv. job skills training
 - v. training or education program of your choice (includes college)
 - vi.

Insist on having an educational or training activity count as your work activity if you are in training or school or have definite plans to attend school or training. Make sure the training activity is listed in your AMR as your work activity. In addition, you can ask that payment for child care expenses and transportation costs you need to attend school or training be included in your AMR.

- h. **12-24 Months.** After the first twelve months you can continue to participate in an educational activity. However, you will also have to participate in a work or work related activity at the same time, unless you are between ages 18 and 22 and are working on your high school diploma or GED. Again, there is no mandatory minimum

amount of time you must devote to the additional work activity. The types of acceptable work activities include:

- i. job search
- ii. job readiness/preparation activities
- iii. subsidized employment (work study is ok)
- iv. work experience (internship or apprenticeship)
- v. on-the-job training
- vi. workfare (a job provided by the assistance office)
- vii. community service (work for a nonprofit or governmental agency)

- i. **After 24 Months.** You can continue your education or training activity **but**, you must also be participating in a work activity at least 20 or 30 hours per week, depending on your household composition. The only acceptable work activities after 24 months are:
 - i. unsubsidized employment
 - ii. subsidized employment
 - iii. work experience
 - iv. on-the-job-training
 - v. community service
 - vi. workfare

· **Important Note: If you are attending school or training and are:**

- j. working
- k. get child support on a regular basis
- l. have another source of income such as Social Security or SSI

You should consider going off cash assistance if your other income is even close to the amount you get on cash assistance. Remember, even if you only get \$1 in cash assistance benefits that will count as a month against your five-year limit. In addition, if you do not get cash assistance the mandatory work requirements no longer apply which may make it easier for you to complete your training program. Remember, you **do not** have to be getting cash assistance to be eligible for medical assistance and food stamps.

· **What will happen if the assistance office says I have not been following the plan in my AMR?**

- m. Your benefits will be suspended. It is very important that you contact Northwestern Legal Services right away if you get a notice proposing to suspend your benefits so an attorney or paralegal can help you.

CHILD SUPPORT

- You must apply for child support to get cash assistance benefits unless your child's mother or father is also living with you. You must have a very good reason for failing or refusing to

identify, by name, the father of a child so they can enter a support order against him. If you do not want to, or are unable to name the father, contact Northwestern Legal Services right away for more assistance.

SPECIAL RULES FOR PARENTS WHO ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 18

- A minor parent must reside with a parent, legal guardian, other adult relative or in an appropriate adult-supervised supportive arrangement. There are some exceptions to this rule. If you are a parent under age 18 and cannot live with your parent(s) for some reason, but need cash assistance for yourself and your child, contact Northwestern Legal Services right away for help.

INCOME AND RESOURCES

- The following rules now apply to income you earn from working and property or other resources you get or own
 - n. 50% of your gross earnings will not count in determining how much cash assistance you receive. The deduction for the cost of dependent care related to employment is deducted following application of the 50 percent disregard.
 - o. Educational assistance and income in kind are not counted in calculating your cash assistance grant. Income in kind are things people do for you or give to you, instead of cash, for work you do for them.
 - p. The cash value of life insurance is not counted as a resource available to you.
 - q. An educational savings account established to pay for post-secondary educational expenses directly to an approved educational institution is not considered a resource.
 - r. Educational assistance in the form of loans, grants and scholarships is also excluded as a resource.
 - s. **One motor vehicle, whatever the value, is excluded as a resource.**

Please call Northwestern Legal Services if the assistance office is taking any action to stop or reduce your benefits or will not give you the AMR you need.

**Call NWLS (800) 665-6957
In Erie County 452-6957
Or Apply online at WWW.NWLS.ORG**

