

# SSI for Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care

A TOOLKIT FOR ADVOCATES

Dear Colleague,

**The Social Security Administration (SSA) has a new policy to help youth transitioning out of foster care access Supplemental Security Income (SSI)!** Youth transitioning out of foster care are a particularly vulnerable population. Studies have confirmed what advocates in the field know from experience – that youth who age out of foster care are more likely to experience negative outcomes, including homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, and lack of access to health care. Many of these young people have disabilities that could qualify them for SSI, and that cash assistance can be a vital source of stability as they transition out of the foster care system. Yet too often, youth leave foster care without SSI benefits in place, and with no other source of income or support, placing them at a high risk of becoming homeless while they wait for their SSI applications to be processed and approved.

Fortunately, the SSA is piloting a new policy that **allows foster youth of any age to apply for SSI up to 6 months (180 days) before they leave care.** Beginning August 1, 2016, foster youth can submit an application and get a disability determination 6 months before their expected discharge date, even if they do not yet meet the income eligibility requirements due to their foster care payments.

This new policy is a one-year pilot program, and we need your help to make it successful! Here's what you can do to help:

- Use the new policy! Help foster youth apply for SSI **6 months before** their expected discharge date.
- Share this toolkit! This toolkit includes several resources intended to spread the news about SSA's policy and to assist in the application process – share it with your colleagues. The toolkit is also available online at [www.jlc.org/SSI](http://www.jlc.org/SSI) or [www.clsphila.org/FosterCareSSI](http://www.clsphila.org/FosterCareSSI).
- Give us feedback! Tell us about any issues you encounter with the policy, as well as any success stories. We want SSA to see the benefit of the new policy, and so it's important to be able to demonstrate the positive impact it has.

Sincerely,

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# SSI FOR YOUTH LEAVING FOSTER CARE

## How to Help Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care Access Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

### What is SSI (and how can it help)?

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a **federal needs-based program** for children and adults with **limited income and resources** who are **disabled**, blind, or age 65 or older. Individuals who are eligible receive a **monthly cash payment**. The 2016 payment amount for an individual without any other income is \$733.

SSI can provide a vital source of stability for disabled youth of any age who are transitioning out of the foster care system. In addition to providing cash assistance that can help pay for housing, SSI is a gateway to other resources for these youth, including Medicaid, food stamps, and many supportive housing programs.

### Is your client eligible?

There are two main components to an SSI eligibility determination: **disability** and **income**.

Your client may have a qualifying disability if:

- He or she has a **behavioral health** condition, **physical disability**, and/or **cognitive impairment**; and
- That disability imposes limitations on functioning.

Income eligibility:

- Individuals must have very low income to be eligible.
- Federal foster care payments count as “income” for purposes of SSI, and so many youth are **not** income eligible while they are still in the foster care system.

Note that additional factors such as citizenship may also affect eligibility.

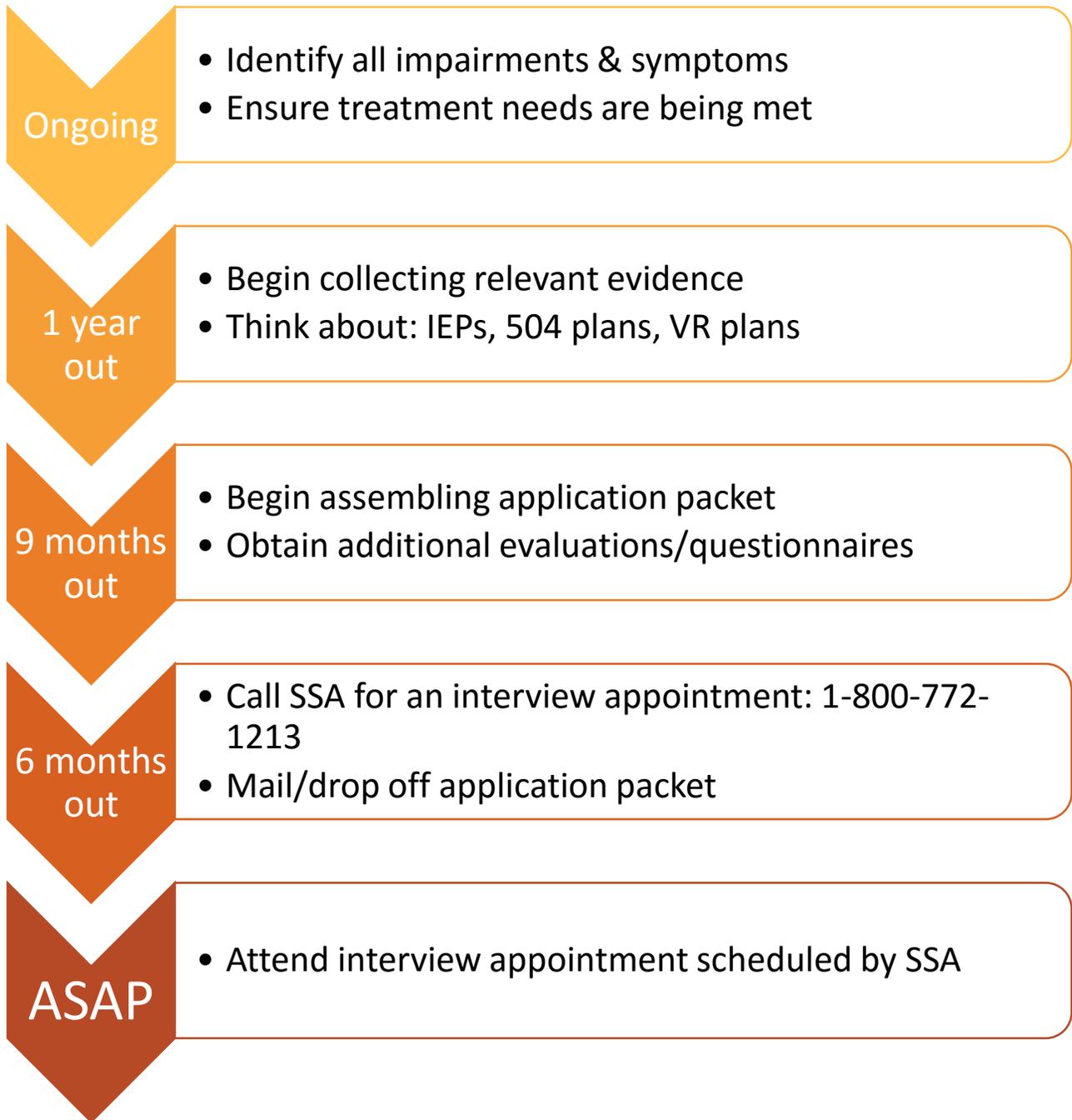
### How to Apply:

- **Apply EARLY.** The Social Security Administration has a special policy that allows foster youth to apply for SSI up to **180 days (6 months)** before they are expected to leave care.
- **Make sure the youth is getting any necessary treatments and has up-to-date evaluations.** Evidence of your client’s treatment history is highly relevant to the eligibility determination.
- **Get copies of medical and school records.** The SSA will send forms requesting these records once you apply, but the process is much faster if you submit them with the initial application.
- **Call SSA to schedule an application interview.** Once you have the documentation and are within 180 days of the discharge date, call the SSA at **1-800-772-1213** to schedule an application interview.

Have questions? Visit [www.jlc.org/SSI](http://www.jlc.org/SSI) or [www.clsphila.org/FosterCareSSI](http://www.clsphila.org/FosterCareSSI) for more info!



# SSI APPLICATION TIMELINE



**DISCHARGE FROM FOSTER CARE**

# Sample Demand Letter

If you think your client has experienced an inappropriate benefits denial based on excess income, use this model letter to call attention to the new SSA policy.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To Whom It May Concern:

\_\_\_\_\_ attempted to file an application for SSI benefits on \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Name of SSI Applicant) (SSI Application Date)

The application was denied or the applicant was unable to file an application based on excess income because the applicant is in foster care. This determination violates the Social Security Administration's policy allowing youth in foster care to apply for SSI benefits 180 days prior to discharge. Pursuant to POMS SI 00601.011 (effective 07/29/2016), youth of any age may apply for SSI benefits if the youth:

- lives in a foster care situation as defined in SI 00830.410.A.1;
- alleges blindness or disability;
- appears likely to meet all of the non-medical eligibility requirements when foster care payments terminate;
- expects the foster care payments to cease within 180 days of the application filing date; and
- is within 180 days of losing foster care eligibility.

The potential applicant currently lives in foster care, alleges blindness or disability, appears likely to meet all non-medical eligibility requirements after leaving care, and is expected to lose foster care eligibility and payments as of \_\_\_\_\_, which is within 180 days of the application date. For  
(Anticipated Discharge Date)

additional information about this policy, please see EM-16024, "Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Applications for Disabled Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care." Based on SSA's current, legally-binding policy, kindly proceed with the disability determination in this case.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)



## **How to Apply for SSI**

**You can apply for SSI benefits in one of three ways:**

- 1. Telephone:** Call 1 (800) 772-1213 (between 7 a.m.-7 p.m. EDT) to schedule an appointment to apply for Social Security Benefits.
- 2. In person:** You can also apply for Social Security Benefits by walking in to your local Social Security Office. You can use the Social Security Officer Locator to find the nearest office: <https://www.ssa.gov/locator>
- 3. Online:** You cannot apply for SSI benefits online, but you can apply for other Social Security benefits at [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov).

### **Tips For Applying For Social Security Benefits If You Are Disabled:**

You do not need to bring anything with you to apply for Social Security Benefits, including photo identification.

However, if you have it, it is a good idea to bring the following with you:

- Photo Identification
- Names and contact information for any doctors you are seeing
- Names and contact information for any therapists, specialists, or other medical professionals you are seeing
- Names of any hospitals where you have received treatment
- Names of any medications you are taking and what they are for
- Names and contact information of any case manager who is assisting you
- Your address and phone numbers
- Be ready to explain how your physical or mental health problems make it difficult to do things in your life and at home

**Medical Records:** You do not need to bring medical records to the Social Security office, but if you have any, hand them in after making a copy. Do not give Social Security your ONLY copy of your medical records.

**If your application is denied, you have 60 days to file an appeal.**

# Additional Resources

## Social Security Administration's Benefit Eligibility Screening Tool

This tool helps you find out if your client could get benefits administered by the SSA, including SSI. <http://ssabest.benefits.gov/>

## Relevant Program Operations Manual System (POMS) Provisions

- [SI 00601.011: Filing Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\) Applications for Disabled Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care](#)  
This provision allows disabled foster youth to file an SSI application 180 days before expected discharge from foster care.
- [DI 25201.011: Making a Determination for Youth in Foster Care When the Application Effective Date Is On or After the Attainment of Age 18](#)  
This provision provides guidance on how eligibility determinations are made for foster youth applying for benefits after age 18.
- [SI 00830.410: Foster Care Payments](#)  
This provision describes how foster care payments affect income eligibility for SSI.

## Additional SSA Resources

- [Spotlight on SSI Benefits for Disabled or Blind Youth in Foster Care](#)  
This resource describes the policy change and provides some basic information about the requirements for filing an SSI application.
- [SSA's FAQ on SSI](#)  
In particular, see the final two questions about SSI and leaving foster care.

## Other Helpful Information

- For additional information about SSI for foster youth, visit [www.jlc.org/SSI](http://www.jlc.org/SSI) or [www.clsphila.org/FosterCareSSI](http://www.clsphila.org/FosterCareSSI).
- For information about Homeless Advocacy Project's SOAR Project in Philadelphia, visit: <http://homelessadvocacyproject.org/soar-project.html>
- For additional resources on transition planning for foster youth with disabilities, visit <http://jlc.org/current-initiatives/transition-adulthood/older-youth-disabilities>