
The Retirement of Diane Wenzler, Director of Benefits Plus Learning Center

It is time to say 'good-bye.' After serving at the Community Service Society for 34 years, and as the director of the Benefits Plus Learning Center since 1999, I will be transitioning to a new phase in life beginning April 12th – retirement!

In September of 1994, a co-worker and I created and launched the Learning Center. We recognized the work of social service professionals, the work you do every day, as so valuable for those you serve. We believed that by equipping you with the resources, information and tools on government benefit programs you would be better prepared to navigate the often-byzantine government system, thus enabling you to effectively assist your clients gain needed safety nets.

It has been a wonderful privilege to work with so many of you who have attended our trainings, subscribed to *Benefits Plus*, and used our Benefit Tools. I truly thank you for all the support and encouragement you have given to this project and to me personally. CSS is committed to keeping this program 'alive' and the team will give you updates as a new director is hired.

All my best for your continued work in fighting for those who need it most.

SNAP Emergency Allotment Granted to Household Previously Not Included

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act authorized an Emergency Allotments (EA) addressing food insecurity to SNAP households during the pandemic. EA provisions allowed SNAP recipient households to receive the maximum amount of SNAP benefits for their household size. The amount of the EA benefit was the difference between the household's regular SNAP allotment and the maximum amount of SNAP benefits for the household size. EA benefits were issued to these households from March 2020 through the March 2021.

However, this meant that households at or near the maximum SNAP benefit amount received little or no support.

The USDA recently [revised their guidance on EA](#) to clarify eligibility to include households already receiving the maximum SNAP benefits. Under the new policy, households who had not received EA payment and those whose EA payments were less than \$95 per month will receive increased benefits. States must adjust and issue the new EA calculations beginning with the April 2021 EA issuance. The guidance states:

- Households who are currently receiving \$95 or more in EA, will continue to receive that same amount—no change in EA for these households;
- Households receiving the maximum SNAP benefit for their household size will receive an EA of \$95 per month;
- Households with a calculated EA amount of less than \$95 will receive EA totaling \$95 per month.

We will provide additional information once NYS has issued their guidance on how and when households will receive additional EA benefits.

Extending the Increase in Maximum SNAP Benefit

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 has extended the increase in the maximum SNAP benefit amount, previously established in the December COVID relief legislation, through September 2021.

Our free Benefit Plus Calculator is updated with the revised amount click [here](#).

Utility Assistance

COVID-19 Moratorium on Utility and Municipal Shutoffs

A moratorium has been in place to prevent utility shut-offs of residential utility services during the COVID-19 crisis. This protection applies to electric, gas, water, telecommunications, cable and internet services, [click here](#) for details. The moratorium expired March 31, 2021 however, an extension to the moratorium passed both the New York State Assembly and Senate, and now it is awaiting a signature from Governor Andrew Cuomo. The new end date for the moratorium would be when the COVID state of emergency is lifted or expires, or December 31, 2021, whichever is later. For those with financial hardship due to COVID, there is an additional 180-day grace period that goes beyond the expiration date.

Lifeline

[Lifeline](#) is a federal program that offers a monthly phone discount to qualified low-income customers. The Lifeline discount can be applied to either home telephone service (landline or cable) or wireless service, and is available for only one line per household. The FCC has temporarily eased the documentation requirements for those who seek to qualify for the Lifeline program based on their income. You can find more information [here](#).

Federal Emergency Broadband Benefit Program

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, which provides a discount of up to \$50 per month for broadband services to eligible households and an enhanced support of up to \$75 for households who live on qualifying Tribal lands. In addition, the program provides a one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet purchased through a [participating provider](#). The one-time discount requires a consumer co-payment of more than \$10 and less than \$50.

To qualify for the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) a household must contain a member who meets one of the following:

- Qualifies for the Lifeline program;
- Receives benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision, or did so in the 2019-2020 school year;
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- Experienced a substantial loss of income since February 29, 2020 and the household's total income was below \$99,000 for single filers and \$198,000 for joint filers in 2020; or

- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating providers' existing low-income or COVID-19 program.

The FCC expects the EBB Program to be open to eligible households before the end of April 2021. Please check [the FCC's website](#) regularly for the latest information.

The EBB benefit is temporary and will expire when funds are exhausted or six months after the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declares the end of the COVID-19 health emergency.

HOUSING NEWS

NYS Tenants Can Remain Protected from Evictions Through May 1st

While the temporary suspension on NYS Housing Court cases ended February 26, 2021, tenants in NYS can remain protected from eviction through May 1st, 2021 if they complete and submit a hardship declaration form to their landlord or housing court in their county. NYS tenants can access hardship declaration forms and email addresses of their county's housing court [here](#).

Alternatively, tenants can go to <https://www.evictionfreeny.org/en/>, an online tool created by [Right to Counsel NYC Coalition](#), [Housing Justice for All](#), and [JustFix.nyc](#). This online tool allows tenants to:

- Fill out their hardship declaration form online in an easy-to-use format.
- Automatically fill in their landlord's information based on the address provided (for NYC tenants only).
- Send the form by email to the courts and their landlord.
- Send the form by USPS Certified Mail to their landlord (for free).
- Receive a confirmation email, which will include USPS tracking information, indicating to whom/where the form was sent (landlord and/or courts).
- Download a PDF of their completed form along with a cover page indicating when the form was generated for their records.

To learn more about the hardship declaration form and the protections against evictions, visit <https://bplc.cssny.org/pbm/covid-19-resources/housing-programs-services/eviction-moratoriums#protections-against-residential-evictions>.

Updated Extensions

NYCHA Waitlist Application Auto-Renewals

NYCHA has extended automatic renewals of NYCHA applications through June 30, 2021. That is, any NYCHA applications set to expire between March 2020 and June 2021 will be auto-renewed and remain on NYCHA's preliminary waitlist without need for any action by the applicant.

For information [click here](#).

CDC Moratorium Extended

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has extended their agency order which prohibits residential evictions for nonpayment of rent to June 30, 2021. This nationwide moratorium was set to expire on March 31, 2021.

For information on the CDC Moratorium, [click here](#).

NYS FHEPS Program Temporarily Removes Eviction Requirement

In March 2021, NYS approved a waiver that eliminates the “Lawsuit Requirement” for State FHEPS applications until May 1st or until the NYS eviction moratorium is lifted. While the waiver is in place, a household may be eligible for State FHEPS without the need for an eviction case in Housing Court, if the landlord has made a written rent demand or given the tenant a letter threatening to sue for nonpayment and eviction. The household will also have to complete the [hardship declaration form](#) utilized to prevent eviction until May 1st under the NYS COVID-19 Emergency Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention Act. All other eligibility requirements for State FHEPS remain unchanged.

The FHEPS (Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement) program provides a rent supplement for households with minor dependent children in receipt of Cash Assistance (CA) who have been evicted or who are facing eviction, or who lost their housing because of health or safety issues, certain court decisions, or domestic violence. To learn more about State FHEPS, visit <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/fheps.page>.

For up-to-date information on State FHEPS as a result of COVID-19, visit <https://bplc.cssny.org/pbm/covid-19-resources/housing-programs-services/fheps>.

SOCIAL SECURITY RETURN TO WORK PROVISIONS (Series)

Reporting Information

All beneficiaries are responsible for reporting all changes to SSA, see what to report [here](#). Reporting wages reporting is particularly important for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries to ensure that the proper work incentives can be applied.

For SSI recipients, changes must be reported no later than the 10th day of the month after the [month of change](#). There is no set timeframe for [SSDI beneficiaries](#) to report earnings however, changes should be reported as soon as possible.

Beneficiaries should report:

- Earnings, this includes the name of the employer, job title, as well as hours and salary.
 - If a beneficiary does not have pay stubs or a work earnings record with the employer’s name or job title, it is best to reach out to the employer for this information.
- Start and End Date of Work. Beneficiaries should include employment status, such as when work began and when work ended.
- Any other changes such as change of address, direct deposit information.

Improvements to mySSA Account

Individuals who have a mySSA account are able to access to their Benefit Award letter, as well as update their address information, banking information, and report earnings.

SSA recently added additional functions, which include application status, status of an appeal filed by an individual or representative and more.

For information on these improvements, go to <https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/application-status.html>.

Representative payees reporting information will need the name and social security number of the individual receiving benefits when reporting.

How to Report

1. *In-Person:* Typically, SSI/SSDI beneficiaries can report wages in person however, SSA offices remain closed due to COVID-19. Reporting should be done with the options below.
2. *By-Mail:* If reporting by mail, beneficiaries may want to try certified mail to ensure delivery and protection of their information. Never mail originals, only copies.
3. *Online:* Beneficiaries may also report changes including earnings by creating a [mySSA](#) account, using [myWageReport](#) to upload pay statements by scanning documents or via a smartphone by taking pictures of pay statements.
4. *By Phone:* SSI/SSDI recipients may also contact their local SSA office for assistance with wage reporting, 1-800-772-1213 or 1-800-325-0778 (TTY). SSI beneficiaries have additional wage reporting options including downloading the free [SSI Mobile Wage Reporting](#) app or by calling a toll free [SSI Telephone Wage Reporting](#) automated system.

Benefits Plus Online

Benefits Plus Updates

- Medicaid
 - New procedure implemented for individuals on the NY State of Health Marketplace who become entitled to managed care. Subscribers can go to, *Medicaid Managed Care Provisions, Transition Procedures for a Medicaid Recipient on the NYS of Health Marketplace Who Becomes Entitled to Medicare.*

Free COVID-19 Resources

Benefits Plus Online is housing *COVID-19 Resources* category available at no cost to all professionals and individuals seeking relevant and up-to-date information on COVID-19. This is offered by the Community Service Society of New York's to support social service professionals who are working with vulnerable population groups during this emergency.

COVID-19 Updates

[COVID-19 Resources, Expansion of Unemployment Insurance: Changes under COVID-19, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance](#)

- Pandemic Unemployment Assistance: Updated PUA benefit information, including taxation of benefits and what to do when a claimant's Benefit Year End (BYE) comes up.

- Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation: Updated information on the availability of additional weeks of PEUC.
- Pandemic Unemployment Compensation: Updated information regarding the extension of the supplemental \$300 through September 6, 2021.

[COVID-19 Resources, Cash Benefits, Cash Assistance: Changes under COVID-19](#)

- Updated waiver extension for conducting eligibility interviews via phone, as well as telephone signatures to June 30, 2021.

[COVID-19 Resources, Cash Benefits, COVID-19: Economic Impact Payment](#)

- Updated information on the one-time \$1,400 cash payment, based on the American Rescue Plan.

[COVID-19 Resources, Food Access and Programs, SNAP: Changes Under COVID-19](#)

- Updated waiver extension for conducting eligibility interviews via phone, as well as telephone signatures to June 30, 2021.

[COVID-19 Resources, Housing Programs & Services, FHEPS: Changes under COVID-19](#)

- Updated to include state's elimination of the "lawsuit requirement" when applying for FHEPS.

[COVID-19 Resources, Housing Programs & Services, Eviction Moratoriums: Under COVID-19](#)

- Added advocacy tip with user-friendly online tool to complete and submit the NYS hardship declaration form.
- Updated CDC Nationwide Residential Moratorium's end date.

[COVID-19 Resources, Housing Programs & Services, Mortgage & Foreclosure Relief: Under COVID-19](#)

- Updated information on the federal foreclosure moratorium and mortgage relief.

[COVID-19 Resources, Housing Programs & Services, NYCHA: Changes under COVID-19](#)

- Updated to include expansion of NYCHA's repair and maintenance work.
- Updated NYCHA's autorenewals of preliminary waitlist applications through June 30, 2021

Not a Benefits Plus Subscriber? Request a free demo [here](#).

Community Resources/Events

The SUNY Online Training Center

SUNY is providing a wide range of free online skill-building programs to help prepare individuals for a new job. After an individual successfully completes a program certificate (and has a high school diploma), they will be eligible for automatic enrollment to any SUNY community college or SUNY Empire to continue an associate or bachelor's degree. More information is available online [here](#).

Free Public Service Loan Forgiveness Presentations

The Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program (EDCAP) is offering free presentations on the [Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(PSLF\) program](#). PSLF is a student loan debt program that forgives the remaining balance on Direct Loans after 120 qualifying monthly payments under a qualifying repayment plan while working full-time for a qualifying employer.

Free presentations on PSLF are available, please contact Carolina Rodriguez (crodriguez@cssny.org; 212-614-5457) to schedule one!

Benefits Counseling Pilot Project (BCPP)

The New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute in April 2020 launched the Benefits Counseling Pilot Project to help people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWH) who are employed or seeking employment to understand how earnings impact their public benefits. Participants of the project will learn what benefits they can receive while they are working to increase their financial independence. For more information contact a [state-wide provider](#).

