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CABHN FEVER

SNAP - New Name, Same Program -

with a few exciting changes!

The 2008 Farm Bill nutrition title comes with great changes. The Food Stamp Program's name has officially been changed to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The renaming of the program allows each state the option to take on the new name, or choose one of their own. The state of Connecticut has chosen to adopt the new name SNAP.

As of October 1, 2008 the following additional changes have been implemented in Connecticut:

- 1) The minimum benefit amount has been raised to \$14.00 and indexed to inflation.
- 2) The standard household deduction has been raised and indexed. The standard deduction for households of 1-3 people is \$144.00.
- 3) The dependent care cap has been lifted allowing participants to deduct the full cost of dependent care.
- 4) Retirement benefits such as IRA's and education accounts are now excluded as assets.
- 5) Combat pay has been excluded as income.

For more information, please call Suzette Strickland at (860) 560-2100 ext. 17.

Statewide Legal Services Client hotline has new hours as of Oct. 20:

Mon: 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
 Tues: 9:00 am - 6:30 pm
 Wed: 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
 Th: 9:00 am - 4:00 pm
 Fri: 9:00 am - 3:45 pm

Client phone & hotline:
 (860) 344-0380
 or 1-800-453-3320

Worried About Your Heating Bills This Winter?



Applications are now being taken for energy assistance, and program benefits begin in November. Applications can take up to 45 days to process, but immediate fuel delivery should be available if needed, after November 3. The deadline to apply is May 1, 2009, *except* utility heated households with a shut-off notice can apply until May 15, 2009. Apply early to ensure you get needed benefits. Even if heat is included in your rent payment, you may be eligible for benefits.

Who is Eligible

If you pay your own heating bill, you may be eligible for assistance if your income is less than the amount in this chart:

Household Size	Monthly Income Limit	Annual Income Limit
1	\$2,439	\$29,272
2	\$3,190	\$38,279
3	\$3,941	\$47,286
4	\$4,691	\$56,293
5	\$5,442	\$65,300
6	\$6,192	\$74,307

If your heat is included in your rent, and your rent is more than 30% of your income, you may be eligible for assistance if your income is less than the amounts in this chart:

Household Size	Monthly Income Limit	Annual Income Limit
1	\$1,300	\$15,600
2	\$1,750	\$21,000
3	\$2,200	\$26,400
4	\$2,650	\$31,800
5	\$3,100	\$37,200
6	\$3,550	\$42,600

Where to Apply

Apply at your local Community Action Agency (CAA). If you cannot go to the CAA due to a disability or illness, ask the CAA for assistance. Call 1-800-842-1132 or Infoline at 2-1-1 for local application sites. Bring proof of income for everyone in the house, a copy of your fuel/utility bill, and either a Social Security number for everyone in the house or proof that anyone without a Social Security number has applied for one, if possible (see below).

Social Security Number Requirements and Immigrants

With limited exceptions, the Department of Social Services (DSS) requires that each person in the household applying for energy assistance provide a Social Security number (SSN) or proof that one has been applied for. There are many people who are eligible for assistance but do not have or know their SSN. Legal immigrants who are not permitted to work have particular problems with this. Even if an immigrant is not eligible for energy assistance, others in his or her household may get benefits.

(See Energy Assistance p.2)

Energy Assistance (Cont. from p. 1)

Note: Anyone having difficulty getting energy assistance because they either don't have an SSN or have difficulty getting one, should contact Statewide Legal Services at 1-800-453-3320 for assistance.

Special Note for Households Heating with Oil, Propane or Kerosene

Because of certain provisions in the state contract, not all oil, propane and kerosene dealers participate in the state Energy Assistance Program. The CAA handling your energy assistance application has a list of participating fuel dealers. You can also call the Department of Social Services hotline and ask for names of participating dealers in your area: 1-800-842-1132.

Arrearage Forgiveness Programs

If you heat with electricity from CL&P or UI, or gas from Yankee Gas, SCG or CNG, apply for the arrearage forgiveness program. In this program, back bills are forgiven if you can make agreed-upon payments regularly.

If you cannot afford the amount the utility asks you to pay each month, ask for a referral to a social service agency working with the utility to evaluate you for a lower payment. You can arrange for payments as low as \$50/month if that is all you can afford. If all required payments are made by April 30th and you are granted energy assistance, the utility will match your payments and any amount you receive for energy assistance, to reduce your debt. The utility will also allow you to continue to make payments at the same amount throughout the summer and avoid a utility shut-off. Those payments will be matched on October 31st.

CL&P and UI have special payment programs for non-heat customers; apply with the utility if you have a back bill. These programs also forgive back bills when you make required payments.

Call Statewide Legal Services at 1-800-344-0380 for assistance if you cannot negotiate a payment agreement you can afford.

Furnace Clean, Tune and Test

A free furnace clean, tune and test is available to energy assistance recipients who heat with oil, kerosene, coal or wood. (The cost will not be deducted from your benefits.)

Emergency Furnace or Boiler Repair/Replacement

If you are a homeowner with an unsafe or broken furnace or boiler, ask at the CAA about a repair or replacement. Homeowners who receive cash assistance from DSS (through TFA, AABD, State Supplemental or SAGA) can also get repairs through DSS if the repairs are necessary to keep family in their home. If you purchase or upgrade your furnace, the state has a rebate program that may help: call OPM at 1-866-940-4676.

Apply for Hardship Status

Protect yourself from a winter shut-off by applying for "hardship" status from your electric and gas companies when you apply for energy assistance. If your utility service was turned off and you qualify for "hardship" status, the utility company must turn your gas heat service or electricity back on by November 1 and keep it on through May 1. If you are a gas heating customer and your service was on last winter because you were a "hardship" case, the utility can require you to pay up to \$100 to get service turned back on. However, it is better to get on the arrearage forgiveness program and make monthly payments to resolve a utility shut-off. This allows you to reduce your debt and avoid a shut-off in the future.

Weatherization Assistance

You may be able to get conservation assistance to help reduce your bills. For help in finding free conservation assistance, go to www.CTSavesEnergy.com – click on "for your home" and then click on "limited income" and your utility company's name. CL&P customers can contact the WRAP program at 1-800-388-9727; UI customers can call 1-877-947-3873 and ask for weatherization assistance.

Gas conservation is coordinated with CL&P and UI. Municipal utilities also have assistance available and can be called directly.

Fuel Banks

Operation Fuel fuel banks and others provide assistance with energy and utility bills. Operation Fuel will provide assistance to households at higher income levels than past winters. For example, the limit for a 1 person household is \$4,066; for 2 people, \$5,317.

Soldiers, Sailors and Marine Fund

This fund provides emergency assistance, including help with utility and energy bills, to honorably discharged veterans who served during specific time periods. Spouses and dependent children can also get assistance. Contact Infoline 2-1-1 to get information on where to apply.*

Changes in HUSKY Continue - What Participants Can Do

The state is in the process of changing the HMO providers in the HUSKY program. As the new HMOs are building their networks, the state is offering HUSKY participants the option to enroll in a new HMO (Aetna Better Health, AmeriChoice of Connecticut or Community Health Network of Connecticut). Mandatory enrollment in the new HMOs may start in November, but this may be delayed. Because the Aetna Better Health and AmeriChoice networks are still quite limited, Legal Services advocates are advising HUSKY participants to stay with their current providers for the moment.

A new option will soon be available to HUSKY A members. The state is starting a pilot Primary Care Case Management (PCCM) program on January 1. Under PCCM, your primary care provider, rather than one of the HMOs, coordinates your health care.

(See HUSKY Changes p. 4)

Register to Vote!

Remember to register to vote for the upcoming November elections. The deadline to register by mail is October 21 and the deadline to register in-person at your local Registrar of Voters is Oct. 28.

To register to vote in Connecticut, you must:

- Be a U.S. citizen
- Be a resident of a Connecticut town
- Be at least 17 years old (must turn 18 before election day)
- Have completed confinement and parole if previously convicted of a felony and have had your voting rights restored by the Registrar.

If you have further questions, you can contact your local Registrar or contact the office of the Secretary of the State at (800) 540-3764 or (860)509-6100.

To register, fill out the appropriate form from websites listed below and submit by mail or in person to your local Registrar of Voters.

Absentee ballots will be available from your Town Clerk's office beginning Oct. 3. You can either fill out an application and have the ballot sent to you, or, you can go to your Town Clerk's office in person and fill out your absentee ballot there. **Absentee ballots must be received by Tuesday, Nov. 4.**

English Language Voter Reg. form:
<http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/LIB/sots/ElectionServices/ElectForms/electforms/ed671.pdf>

Spanish Language Voter Reg. form:
<http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/LIB/sots/ElectionServices/ElectForms/electforms/ed671sp.pdf>

Address List for Registrars of Voters:
<http://www.sots.ct.gov/sots/LIB/sots/ElectionServices/lists/ROVOfficeAddresses.pdf>

**Make Your Vote
Count On Nov. 4th!**



Vote "NO" On Constitutional Convention Ballot Question

The November 4 election ballot includes a referendum on whether to call a constitutional convention to rewrite the state Constitution. We believe that such a convention could jeopardize government services for low-income people and recommend a vote of "no".

The state Constitution requires a vote every 20 years on whether to call a constitutional convention. Twenty years ago, the idea of a convention was rejected. This year, a number of groups are actively working for a convention. Groups advocating for a convention are supporting, among other changes, denying rights to immigrants, imposing mandatory three strikes laws, repealing the state income tax and capping property taxes without providing alternative revenue sources. These revenue changes could tie the hands of state and local governments so that they could not meet the needs of poor people or provide adequate funding for education.

The League of Women Voters, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Connecticut Citizen Action Group, the National Association of Social Workers, the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits, the Connecticut Education Association and Planned Parenthood are among the organizations urging voters to vote "no" on this proposal. Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz, Treasurer Denise Nappier, and Comptroller Nancy Wyman also oppose the convention.

What Can You Do?

- ✓ Make sure you find the Constitutional Convention question on the ballot when you vote in the November election and Vote NO on November 4.
- ✓ Tell your friends and associates to vote NO. For more information, go to www.ctvoteno.org.

(Prepared by Rafie Podolsky, Staff Atty., on behalf of the Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT)

Social Security Payments Available on Debit Cards

Recipients of Social Security and SSI can now receive their monthly payments on a debit card called a **Direct Express Card**, instead of having payments made by direct deposit into a bank account or receiving a check. Use of the new Direct Express Card has many advantages, especially if you do not have a bank account for direct deposit.

Direct Express cards can be used anywhere MasterCard is accepted, at ATMs, and on the internet or phone. They can be used to purchase money orders from the U.S. Post Office and can be used to pay for purchases, and get cash back, at stores. Accounts do not have overdraft or loan fees. Transactions are simply declined if there are not enough funds in the account. The cards come with a PIN number for security.

One big advantage: Unlike bank accounts, Direct Express accounts cannot be attached by creditors. Social Security and SSI funds are legally exempt from attachments, but banks sometimes freeze a debtor's account during a collection action. This makes it impossible for a Social Security or SSI recipient to access payments that are in their account. These freezes can last up to several weeks.

But, it is not possible to write checks on a Direct Express account. If a recipient needs to use checks (*ie, to pay rent*), maintaining a bank account will be necessary.

There are limited fees involved with the card system. A fee of 75 cents will be charged monthly if the recipient chooses to receive monthly statements (*you can check your balance at an ATM or on line for free*). The first ATM withdrawal every month is free; after that, each ATM withdrawal costs 90 cents. If an account card is lost or stolen, it costs \$4 for a replacement. Liability for unauthorized purchases made on a lost or stolen cards is limited to \$50 if the loss is reported within 2 days and

(See SS Debit Cards p. 4)

HUSKY Changes (cont. from p. 2)

The provider receives an additional fee for providing this service. Providers who want to participate in this system on January 1 must apply to DSS by October 24. HUSKY participants should talk to their providers about this option and encourage their providers to sign up. Information for providers is on the Department of Social Services website - <http://www.ct.gov/dss/site/default.asp>.

SS Debit Cards (cont. from p. 3)

\$500 if reported within 90 days.

Social Security and SSI recipients can sign up for the Direct Express Card by contacting Comerica Bank at 1-877-212-9991 (toll free) or www.USDirectExpress.com.

NEACH Voter Guide

The New England Alliance for Children's Health (NEACH) is a regional coalition of health care advocates, providers, child advocates, legal experts, business leaders, and families that works to provide quality, accessible health care to all of the region's children. In mid-October, NEACH will release the results of its regional Congressional candidate questionnaire on issues that affect children and families in an online Voter's Guide. The Guide will provide candidate biographies, contact information, and will allow you to contact candidates with your opinions.

In developing the questionnaire, NEACH partnered with organizations in New England states, including CT Voices for Children and CT Children's Medical Center. Log on to www.votersguidene.org (in mid-Oct.) to find out where your candidates stand on children's issues and let them know how important these issues are to you.

Upcoming CABHN/FESN Meeting

**Friday, Nov. 7th
9:30-11:30 A.M.**

**Community Renewal Team
(CRT)
555 Windsor St., Hartford**

Topics:

Review Election Results

**Planning for the 2009
Legislative Session**

The Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs (CABHN) is a statewide network of individuals, community groups and organizations which supports and promotes advocacy on low-income issues. For more information, please call (860) 278-5688.

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**Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT and
CABHN (Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs)**
44 Capitol Ave., Suite 301
Hartford, CT 06106



The Raymond Settlement: *Impacting the Rights of DSS Clients with Disabilities*

Presented by: Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc., Connecticut Legal Services, Inc., New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc., Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT, and the Connecticut Department of Social Services

Thursday, November 6, 2008

Registration & Continental Breakfast: 9:00-10:00 a.m.

Conference: 10:00 a.m to 1:00 p.m.

Legislative Office Building, Room 2C

300 Capitol Avenue

Hartford, CT*

About the Conference:

Please join us for a free half-day conference to discuss the Raymond v. Rowland court settlement. This settlement is designed to help low income clients with disabling conditions navigate their way through the DSS benefits systems.

Raymond v. Rowland provides a wide range of DSS system improvements including:

- Designated, trained staff to assist clients with disabilities
- Improved telephone and document management systems
- Modified service needs assessments for employment services
- Computer tracking of clients' disabling conditions and reasonable accommodations
- ADA reasonable accommodation and grievance procedures

Featured Speakers to Include:

Michael P. Starkowski, Commissioner, CT Dept. of Social Services

Kevin Loveland, Director of Assistance Programs, CT Dept. of Social Services

Representatives from Office for Civil Rights Region 1, U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services

Attorneys for the plaintiffs, presenting and answering questions:

Shirley Bergert, Connecticut Legal Services

Steve Eppler-Epstein, Connecticut Legal Services

Greg Bass and Lucy Potter, Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Joanne Gibau, New Haven Legal Assistance

Program Agenda:

- | | | | |
|-------|---|-------|---|
| 10:00 | Welcome and Overview of the <i>Raymond</i> Settlement | 11:45 | Procedures for Requesting Reasonable Accommodations and Pursuing Grievances |
| 10:20 | Remarks by DSS Comm. Starkowski | 12:15 | Office for Civil Rights Complaint and Resolution Agreement Process |
| 10:30 | How DSS is Implementing the <i>Raymond</i> Settlement – the Operational Details | 12:45 | Questions and Answer Session |
| 11:30 | Break | 12:55 | Wrap-Up |

Who Should Attend?

Social service providers, DSS clients, legal advocates, and others who work on behalf of clients with disabling conditions seeking access to benefits and services from the Department of Social Services.

**Free parking available in LOB parking lot*

To Register



The Raymond Settlement:

*Impacting the Rights of Department of Social Services
Clients with Disabilities*

November 6, 2008 - LOB Rm. 2C

Check-in & Continental Breakfast 9-10AM

Your Name:

Organization:

Contact Info (please include phone & email):

Please print, fill out and fax to Maureen Brown at LARCC (860) 278-2957