

## Legal Services Offices

### Statewide Legal Services

Entry point for the legal services network in Connecticut.  
**860-344-0380** Central CT area or **1-800-453-3320**.

#### Other Legal Services Programs:

##### Hartford, Hartford County:

##### Greater Hartford Legal Aid

999 Asylum Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06105  
(860) 541-5000  
FAX: (860) 541-5050

##### Greater New Haven Area:

##### New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc.

426 State Street  
New Haven, CT 06510  
(203) 946-4811  
TDD: (203) 946-4811  
FAX: (203) 498-9271

##### Throughout Connecticut:

##### Connecticut Legal Services:

*Administrative Office:* (860) 344-0447

##### Offices:

211 State Street  
Bridgeport, CT 06604  
(203) 336-3851

16 Main Street  
New Britain, CT 06051  
(860) 225-8678

153 Williams Street  
New London, CT 06320  
(860) 447-0323

20 Summer Street  
Stamford, CT 06901  
(203) 348-9216

85 Central Avenue  
Waterbury, CT 06702  
(203) 756-8074

872 Main Street  
Willimantic, CT 06226  
(860) 456-1761

##### AIDS Legal Network for CT

999 Asylum Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06105  
(860) 541-5027 or 1-888-380-3646

This pamphlet was produced by the Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT in cooperation with Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, and Statewide Legal Services.

The information in this pamphlet is based on the laws in CT as of April 2009. We hope that the information is helpful. It is not intended as legal advice for an individual situation. If you need further help and have not done so already, please call Statewide Legal Services (see above) or contact an attorney.

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##### Visit us on the internet:

[www.slsct.org](http://www.slsct.org)  
[www.ghla.org](http://www.ghla.org)  
[www.nhlegal.org](http://www.nhlegal.org)  
[www.connlegalservices.org](http://www.connlegalservices.org)  
[www.larcc.org](http://www.larcc.org)



## Temporary Family Assistance Program (TFA or State Welfare)



Read this pamphlet if...

- **You are on welfare** through the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) *or*
- **You need financial help** from the State, *and*
  - You or your child will be in danger if the state tries to collect child support from the father of your child or tries to prove that he is the father.
  - The abuse keeps you from working or looking for a job.
  - You are living in a shelter or have a restraining or protective order.

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Advocates at legal services and domestic violence shelter programs can help you with legal and safety needs and work with you to help keep you and your children safe.

**For help or more information call:**

◆ *Statewide Legal Services* ◆  
1-800-453-3320 (toll free)

◆ *A domestic violence shelter program* ◆  
1-888-774-2900 (Statewide toll-free hotline)

◆ *One of the local legal services programs* ◆  
See back of this pamphlet for phone numbers

**ALL CALLS ARE CONFIDENTIAL**



Connecticut requires people receiving welfare benefits to:

- 1) help the state collect child support;
- 2) help prove who your child's father is if he has not agreed he is the father (referred to as "establishing paternity"); and
- 3) work or look for work.

**If you do not do these things, your welfare benefits could be cut off or reduced.** In addition, many families will only receive welfare benefits for 21 months unless the Department of Social Services (DSS) gives them an extension. Keep reading this pamphlet to find out more about what you need to do to continue to receive benefits.

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*NOTE:* This pamphlet is written for a woman who is afraid of a boyfriend, husband, or partner. However, the information in this pamphlet would also be helpful to a man who is afraid of his partner.

If you are hit by your partner or are afraid of him or her, DSS may consider you a "victim of domestic violence." **If you are a victim of domestic violence**, under some circumstances, *you may be excused from:*

- helping the state collect child support for your children;
- helping the state establish paternity; and
- work requirements.

✓ *And, you may be able to keep receiving welfare* benefits after 21 months or get benefits even if you have been sanctioned off or have used up the time limit on benefits.

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**Important:** Even if you are a victim of domestic violence, it may be safe for you to help establish paternity, collect child support, work or look for work, and go off welfare at the end of your benefit period. If so, you will not need to ask for the help described in this pamphlet or tell your welfare worker about the violence. *It may still be helpful for you to talk with the local domestic violence shelter program.*

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***What if I or my child will be in danger if the state tries to establish paternity or collect child support?***

Generally, everyone who needs welfare must help the state establish paternity and collect child support **unless there is a good reason not to help.** (*See next page.*) Without a good reason, you will not get welfare money. **Helping the state might include:**

- giving your worker the name and social security number of your child's father,
- giving other information about your child's father,
- going to court hearings, and
- going for blood tests that will prove he is the father.



**If you do not provide this help without a good reason, you may not get any welfare money.**

Your DSS worker might not make you help establish paternity or collect child support if:

- helping will put you or your child in danger;
- you do not have accurate information because the father of your children lied about who he is; or
- something beyond your control keeps you from helping or having information about the father.

*You will have to tell your DSS worker the reason you cannot help.* Your worker may take your word for it or may ask you for proof. (See page 7.) If your worker decides you have a good reason, you **can** receive welfare without cooperating with the child support enforcement process.

### ***What if I thought it would be safe to help establish paternity or collect child support, but it turned out not to be?***

If trying to establish paternity or collect child support is putting you or your child in danger, it should be possible to get DSS to stop. You will need to ask your DSS worker to get the state to stop trying to collect child support.

*If you have been hurt or threatened by your boyfriend or husband, Connecticut laws can give you special protection and services. Advocates at a domestic violence shelter program can tell you about your options and help you stay safe. Call 1-888-774-2900.*

### ***If the father of my child pays child support, does he get legal rights to the child?***

Yes. In order to get child support from the father of your child, there must be *legal proof* that he is the father. If you and he signed official papers stating he is the father, that will be enough proof.

**Once there is legal proof** that he is the father, **he then has the same custody rights to the child as you do. He can also ask for visitation** even if he is not paying any child support.

There can be custody and visitation problems once the father of your child becomes the official legal father. But, there also may be some benefits. It might mean he will be more involved in your child's life in a good way. Also, it can lead to child support, medical insurance and other important help for your child. **It may be helpful to talk these issues over with an advocate** from legal services or a domestic violence shelter program. You may need to go to court to get custody and visitation orders.

### ***What if I cannot work or look for work?***

Your DSS worker can take away some or all of the welfare money you receive (called "sanctioning") unless you have a good reason for not working or looking for work. You will need to tell your DSS worker the reason. One reason a worker might accept is that your partner is violent or abusive and this keeps you from working or looking for work. Other reasons a worker might accept are:

- An abusive partner does something to make you lose the child care you need.
- You need to attend court hearings because of domestic violence and this keeps you from working or looking for work.
- Physical or mental injuries caused by a partner keep you from working or looking for work. (*Note: If you cannot work at all for at least 30 days, you may be able to get an exemption from both the time limits and work requirements.*)
- The job is in a location that puts you at risk of harm; or
- Another good reason that does not have anything to do with the violence.

If you are not working, your DSS worker might send you to an Employment Services program that will help you find work. If you do not go to an appointment set up for this, your worker can take away some or all of your cash benefits. If you have just applied for welfare benefits, you may not get assistance until you go to the Employment Services appointment. Your worker might also send you to a DSS social worker for help.

If you believe it would be better for you to be working with a domestic violence professional to help you escape the violence than to be looking for a job or taking job training, you can ask to be referred to a domestic violence shelter for employment services help. Call legal services if your worker refuses to refer you or does not know how to make a referral.



**Note:** There are a number of good reasons for not working or looking for work. For more information about these rules, read our pamphlets: “*Penalties under TFA*” and “*TFA: Time Limits & Other Programs Available If You Lose Cash Benefits.*”

### **What if I can't go to the Employment Services program?**

If you cannot go because your boyfriend or husband is abusive, you might *not* have to go if you tell the Employment Services worker. But, the worker might make you go for domestic violence services or require you to take some other action that makes it possible for you to work or attend the program. You may be able to get special benefits such as transportation or child care if you need them in order to participate. **Remember:** You can ask that *domestic violence services* be considered your *employment services* if you do not feel safe preparing for work.

### **What if my 21 months is running out or has already run out and I need help?**

You may be able to get welfare for more than 21 months if the violence keeps you from working or limits your hours of work. You will need to tell your worker about the violence and ask for an extension. You may be able to get welfare even if you have used up all 60 months.

There are other reasons why a person can get welfare after 21 months. For example, you can get **up to two 6-month extensions** if you have worked or looked for work and your family income is

still very low. Some families may be able to get **more than 2 extensions** if there are multiple problems besides domestic violence. For example, they cannot arrange child care, there are drug or alcohol issues or severe learning disabilities, or a disabled household member needs care. However, most families who are found capable of work cannot get welfare benefits for more than 60 months except where domestic violence prevents them from safely working.

If you have a restraining order or protective order or you are in a domestic violence shelter and have not used up all 60 months, the domestic violence is probably enough to grant you a third (or more) extension--even without any other employment barrier. If this is your situation and you're denied an extension, call legal services.

If something keeps you from working, it is important to try to figure out if you will be able to keep your benefits after 21 months. Some families with serious emotional, mental, or physical health problems do not have time limits on how long they can get assistance. Call the advocates at legal services for help figuring the best plan for your family. For more about these rules, see the legal services pamphlet, *TFA: Time Limits & Other Programs Available If You Lose Cash Benefits.*

### **Should I tell my DSS worker about the violence?**

The law says that it is up to you whether or not you tell your DSS worker about the violence.

**You may need to tell your worker about the violence IF the violence is keeping you from following the rules and**

- you still want to receive welfare benefits, or
- you have used up all your time on welfare, or
- you have been sanctioned off of welfare benefits.

Advocates at legal services and domestic violence shelter programs can help you figure out whether or not you need to tell your worker about the violence.

### **You do NOT need to tell your worker about the violence IF:**

- it is safe for you to help establish paternity, collect child support, work or look for work, and go off welfare at the end of a time limit, **or**
- you can qualify for an extension of benefits without telling your worker about the domestic violence. *If you*
  - already received two extensions of welfare benefits,
  - the violence does not stop you from working or limit how much you can work, and
  - you have two other barriers that allow you to qualify for welfare benefits,  
... you may qualify for an extension without telling your worker about the violence.

There may be a lot of reasons why you might not want to talk about what is happening in your relationship, such as:

- You might find it difficult or unsafe for you to talk about the violence.
- You might think that your DSS worker will not understand what you are going through and might not help you.
- You might be worried that your DSS worker will call DCF and report child abuse if she/he knows what is going on in your family.
- You might be worried that your DSS worker will ask you to do things that you do not think are safe or appropriate, such as getting a protective order or going to counseling.
- You might not want them to “know your business.”

### **What if my worker is telling me I have to do something that will put me in more danger?**

If you are experiencing domestic violence and your worker tells you to do something that puts you or your children in danger or does not seem right, call legal services or a domestic violence shelter program for advice right away.

### **What should I do if I told my worker about the violence and it did not help?**

Even if you tell your worker about the violence, your welfare benefits may still be cut off or reduced. Call legal services or a domestic violence shelter program for advice right away.

### **What can I do if I disagree with my worker's decision?**

You have the right to ask for a “fair hearing.” At a fair hearing, an independent hearing officer listens to both sides and decides who is right. **To protect your rights and benefits, ask for a hearing right away.**

#### **How do I ask for a fair hearing?**

- You must either use the simple appeal form attached to the notices DSS sends you or write a letter. If you write a letter, explain why you want a hearing, such as:

*Dear Sir or Madam: I am writing to ask for a fair hearing. The reason I want a fair hearing is \_\_\_ (your reason). For example, “my worker thinks I did not have good cause to leave my job, and I disagree.”*

**The letter should include the date, your DSS client number, and your address. You must sign your name. Make a copy for yourself.**

- You must mail or fax your request to:  
DSS, Office of Administrative Hearings  
25 Sigourney St., 12th Floor  
Hartford, CT 06106  
*Phone: 1-800-462-0134 or 860-424-5760. Fax: 860-424-5729.*

#### **How quickly do I need to ask for a fair hearing?**

- You **must** send your fair hearing request to DSS **within 60 days** of the date of the notice DSS sent you about your benefits. *(Keep the envelope from DSS so you can show the date you received the notice.)*

❑ In most situations, **if you ask for a hearing within 10 days** of the date on the DSS notice, your benefits will not be lowered or stopped until the hearing officer makes a decision. **However**, if you are at the *end of the 21-month* period of benefits or at the *end of a 6-month extension*, your benefits will not continue while you are waiting for a hearing. *If the hearing officer agrees with you*, you will receive your benefits and be paid any back benefits you should have received. if your benefits were lowered or stopped. *If the hearing officer does not agree you should have gotten benefits*, DSS can get back any payments that you should not have received by lowering your monthly benefits in the future., or by taking other action to collect the “overpayment.”

✓ Call Statewide Legal Services before your hearing (1-800-453-3320). Statewide Legal Services can give you helpful information and may be able to arrange for a legal aid lawyer to go with you to the hearing.

### **Where can I get help with immigration questions?**

If you are an immigrant and a victim of domestic violence at the hands of your sponsor, you may be able to “petition” (ask) the government on your own to allow you and your children to remain in the United States.

Local legal services programs and domestic violence shelter programs may be able to help you or help you get in touch with people who can help with immigration issues.

The International Institute is a non-profit social service agency that provides services to immigrants, refugees and their families. They have three offices:

670 Clinton Avenue, Bridgeport	(203) 336-0141
330 Main St., 3rd Floor, Hartford	(860) 278-1987
22 Grove St., Stamford	(203) 965-7190

### **Domestic Violence Shelter Programs**

(listed alphabetically by town)

**24 Hour Hotline:  
1-888-774-2900**

#### **Ansonia:**

The Umbrella  
Hotline (203) 736-9944  
Office (203) 736-2601

#### **Bridgeport:**

The Center for Women & Families  
of Eastern Fairfield County, Inc.  
Hotline (203) 384-9559  
Office (203) 334-6154

#### **Danbury:**

Women's Center of Greater Danbury  
Hotline (203) 731-5206  
Office (203) 731-5200

#### **Dayville:**

Domestic Violence Prog. United Svcs  
Hotline (860) 774-8648  
Office (860) 774-7243

#### **Enfield**

Network Against Domestic Abuse  
Hotline (860) 763-4542  
Office (860) 763-7430

#### **Greenwich:**

Domestic Abuse Service (YWCA)  
Hotline (203) 622-0003  
Office (203) 869-6501 x171

#### **Hartford:**

Hartford Interval House  
Hotline (860) 527-0550  
Office (860) 246-9149

#### **Meriden:**

Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis  
Hotline (203) 238-1501  
Office (203) 630-1638

#### **Middletown:**

New Horizons  
Hotline (860) 347-3044  
Office (860) 344-9599

#### **New Britain:**

Prudence Crandall Center for Women  
Hotline (860) 225-6357  
Office (860) 225-5187

#### **New Haven:**

Domestic Violence Serv. of Greater NH  
Hotline (203) 789-8104  
Office (203) 865-1957

#### **New London:**

Women's Center of Southeastern CT  
Hotline (860) 701-6000  
Office (860) 447-0366

#### **Norwalk:**

Domestic Violence Crisis Center  
Hotline (203) 852-1980  
Office (203) 853-0418

#### **Sharon**

Women's Support Services  
Hotline (860) 364-1900  
Office (860) 364-1080

#### **Stamford:**

Domestic Violence Crisis Center  
Hotline (203) 357-8162  
Office (203) 965-0049

#### **Torrington:**

Susan B. Anthony Project  
Hotline (860) 482-7133  
Office (860) 489-3798

#### **Waterbury:**

Safe Haven of Waterbury  
Hotline (203) 575-0036  
Office (203) 575-0388

#### **Willimantic:**

Domestic Violence Program  
United Services  
Hotline (860) 456-9476  
Office (860) 456-9275