KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Questions about SNAP (food stamps) and Public Assistance (welfare)

Do I need to bring someone who speaks English with me to apply for food stamps or public assistance?

No! On the contrary—according to the law, the center must provide you with an interpreter and documents translated into your preferred language.

Do I need a social security number to apply for benefits?

No! You do not need a social security number to apply for benefits. However, if you or someone in your family has a social security number, you must provide it.

The HRA worker told me I’m not eligible for benefits. What do I do?

You should always submit a written request, even if the worker says you are not eligible. The worker cannot make this decision—it must be sent to you in writing with a complete reason for the decision. Come to our Legal Clinic for more help.

I don’t have the documents the center is requesting. What do I do?

Try to bring a letter or other documents that include the information that the center is requesting. For example, if you don’t have pay stubs, you can bring a letter that states how much you work and how much you are paid. If you don’t have a lease, you can bring a letter that states how much you pay for rent. If you cannot produce the documents requested, write a letter yourself with the information requested and explain that you were unable to get other documentation. Come to our Legal Clinic for more assistance.

Will I have to pay back the food stamps or public assistance benefits that I receive?

Generally speaking, you will not have to pay back the food stamps or public assistance that you receive – the assistance is free. However, it is important that you provide the center with accurate information to avoid overpayments and other problems. If you receive a letter stating that the city wants you to pay back benefits, come to our Legal Clinic immediately.

Can the food stamp/public assistance center report me to US immigration officials or ICE?

No, in general, the centers cannot report or share information with immigration officials. New York City prohibits officials from sharing this information. The only exception is if you have a Final Order of Deportation from the U.S. Government. In this case, the center can report you.

Can receiving food stamps affect my immigration application?

No, receiving food stamps should not affect any immigration application. The only exception is if you intentionally provide false or fraudulent information to the center.

Can receiving public assistance affect my immigration application?

If you are already a permanent resident, receiving public assistance or other benefits will not affect your citizenship application. If you are not yet a permanent resident, receiving public assistance (but not food stamps) for you, and only you, can be considered among other factors in your application for a green card / permanent residency. If you are receiving public assistance for your children or other members of your family, it shouldn’t affect your application for a green card / permanent residency, unless public assistance is your family’s only source of income. Consult an immigration lawyer regarding the matter.