

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)



What You Need to Know About Food Stamps

Purpose

The purpose of the Food Stamp Program is to help low-income people buy nutritious food. The amount of Food Stamps you can receive is based on your household size, income and assets. Food Stamps can be used to buy food but cannot be used to buy alcohol, pet food, soap, toothpaste, toilet paper or hot food from a store's deli.

You Have the Right to Get Your Food Stamps Within 30 Days of Filing Your Application

File your application the SAME DAY you go to your local Department of Children and Families (DCF) or community based organization (CBO) office. A community based organization is a private organization or church that may be closer to you and that can assist you with applying for Food Stamps. You can find local CBOs at www.myfamilies.com.

If your family includes someone who is ineligible for Food Stamps because of immigration status, the rest of your family can apply for Food Stamps without including that individual.

If you have little or no income, ask for "EXPEDITED SERVICE." DCF has seven (7) calendar days to get you "emergency" Food Stamps if you qualify. The seven-day period begins from the date you apply.

What To DO If Your Stamps Are Reduced or Cut Off

- ◆ You have the right to appeal a notice from DCF. You have 90 days to request a fair hearing
- ◆ You have the right to continue getting the same amount of Food Stamps IF you file an appeal within ten (10) days of the DCF notice stating there will be a reduction or termination of your Food Stamps. You have 10 days from the *date on the notice* to file your appeal

- ◆ Put your request for a fair hearing appeal in writing and keep a copy. You should immediately contact your local legal services office for assistance with the fair hearing
- ◆ **DO NOT SIGN A WAIVER FOR ANY REASON UNLESS AN ATTORNEY OR PARALEGAL ADVISES YOU TO DO SO**

When You Are Recertified

- You should keep getting Food Stamps on time IF you file your recertification application by the 15th of the last month your Food Stamps are scheduled to end.
- If you have trouble getting the required verification, notify DCF your caseworker. Contact your local legal services office if you continue to have problems.

Tip:

- ◆ If you have trouble getting the required verification of household size, income, or assets, submit a written request to DCF for help. If DCF is unable to assist you, contact your local legal services office for help with verification.
- ◆ Keep a copy of any documents you submit to DCF and note the date on it to verify that you submitted those documents in a timely manner. Keep a copy of the verification you submit for your own records.

Overpayment of Food Stamps

If you receive a Notice of Case Action from the Department of Children and Families telling you that you were overpaid Food Stamp Benefits, you have rights. You can request a Fair Hearing and/or request a Compromise of the overpayment.

When Should I Request a Fair Hearing?

If you believe that DCF is wrong and you were not overpaid or you believe that the amount of the overpayment is wrong, you can and should request a Fair Hearing. A request for a Fair Hearing must be filed within ninety (90) days of the date of the Notice. If you failed to appeal the Notice within the 90 days, you will lose your right to object to the overpayment itself.

Can I stop my benefits from being automatically reduced or ended during the appeal?

Yes, to keep your benefits at the current level, you must file a Request for a Fair Hearing within ten (10) days of the Notice and request that your benefits not be reduced while the appeal is pending.

When should I request a compromise of the overpayment?

If you believe the overpayment is correct but you are unable to repay it AND the overpayment occurred due to agency error or inadvertent household error, you may be able to obtain a Compromise of the overpayment.

A compromise is when DCF agrees to eliminate the overpayment altogether. You may be able to be approved for a compromise in certain situations, such as: your household income is fixed and based on age and/or disability, if you are in bankruptcy proceedings, or if you can prove that due to your ongoing expenses you will not be able to repay the debt within 36 months.

For further information, please contact CLSMF.

What if my request for compromise is denied?

You have ninety (90) days to appeal this denial by requesting a Fair Hearing. If you fail to timely appeal the denial of your compromise, you will not be able to file a new Compromise request. It is very important that you do not let your appeal time pass without filing a Fair Hearing Request.

What can DCF do to collect the overpayment?

DCF can take several avenues to collect on the overpayment including recoupment of your current Food Stamp benefits (10%) and intercept your tax refund.

When should I seek legal counsel if I receive an overpayment notice?

As soon as possible. Community Legal Services can review your paperwork and evaluate your case for merits in both a Fair Hearing and a Compromise request. We can assist you in preparing your papers and, if we find your case has merit, we can undertake representation.

Will I have to pay for legal services provided?

If you call us, you will not have to pay any attorney's fees. We are a non-profit organization providing free legal services to eligible indigent persons in Central Florida.

This brochure is a publication of the Public Benefits Unit of Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida, Inc. This information is for general education only and is not intended to be used to solve individual problems, nor does it replace the advice of an attorney. The law which supports conclusions contained herein is subject to change.

Knowing you Food Stamp rights can help you and your family get better treatment

About Us



The mission of CLSMF is to provide access to justice through high quality legal assistance to low-income persons.

CLSMF is a nonprofit legal aid organization which provides free legal assistance to low-income people with civil legal problems in twelve counties across Central Florida. Since 1966, dedicated CLSMF lawyers, paralegals, legal assistants and advocates have worked diligently to solve civil legal problems for people facing life-changing situations, such as domestic violence, unlawful eviction, or the loss of veterans' health or public benefits.

We are committed to delivering the highest quality legal aid, with dignity and respect, for those who are seeking access to justice.

**We do not provide legal assistance in criminal or traffic matters*

How To Contact Us



To contact CLSMF, call the Helpline at the number in your county found on the back of this booklet from 8:30am to 4:30pm Monday through Friday, or apply online at www.clsmf.org

Once you contact our Helpline, we will find out:

1. If you are financially eligible for our services
2. If your problem is one we can handle

If you qualify for our services and we have the resources to assist you, we will either:

- ◆ give advice or educational information to help you with the next steps of the legal process;
- ◆ refer you to a volunteer attorney, or
- ◆ provide a staff attorney to represent you in your legal matter.

You can also receive assistance through community legal education, brief advice and free legal advice clinics that CLSMF hosts throughout Central Florida. Check our website for dates and locations at www.clsmf.org

BREVARD*: 866-469-7444

CITRUS & SUMTER

106 N. Osceola Avenue, Inverness, FL 34450
CITRUS: (352) 726-6592 | **SUMTER**: 800-984-2918

FLAGLER: 800-405-1417

HERNANDO: 866-801-5566

LAKE: (352) 343-6351

226 West Main Street, Tavares, FL 32778

MARION: (352) 629-6257

2300 SE 17th Street, Suite 201, Ocala, FL 34471

ORANGE*: (407) 841-7777

122 E. Colonial Drive, Suite 200, Orlando, FL 32801

OSCEOLA: (407) 933-1791

800 North Main Street, Kissimmee, FL 34744

PUTNAM: (386) 385-0928

216 S. 6th Street, Palatka, FL 32177

SEMINOLE*: (407) 322-6673

VOLUSIA: (386) 258-5600

128 Orange Avenue, Suite 100, Daytona Beach, FL 32114

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE: (386) 523-9181

Client toll-free: 800-363-2357

Florida Relay TTY calls Dial 711

Via email: info@clsmf.org

Apply for help online: applyforhelp.clsmf.org

**Certain legal services not provided*

All CLSMF offices are wheelchair accessible.

www.clsmf.org