



Connecticut Department of Social Services

NEWS RELEASE

Media contact: David Dearborn
860-424-5024; david.dearborn@ct.gov

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DSS Extending Health, Food Benefits For 15,500 Low-Income Households

(HARTFORD, CT) – Social Services Commissioner Roderick L. Bremby today announced that he has ordered the protective extension of medical and food benefits for about 15,500 low-income households at risk of losing eligibility Sept. 1.

The special measure will ensure that children, families and adults with disabilities are not cut off from Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at their annual eligibility ‘redetermination’ point.

The Department of Social Services is implementing new technology to handle incoming paperwork, and volume has skyrocketed since the system was launched statewide in July.

“We are committed to full modernization of our business processes for Connecticut residents who are DSS clients, our hard-working staff, and the general taxpaying public,” Commissioner Bremby said. “Currently, the sheer volume of applications, redetermination forms and other paperwork flowing into the new central document scanning center has caused delays on the other end. By this, I mean that DSS workers are not getting timely access to all incoming documents on their computer screens from the scanning center. While we direct measures to upgrade capacity with our scanning contractor, we also need to make sure that our clients are not harmed by the volume affecting system capacity.”

Commissioner Bremby directed the extension of Medicaid/HUSKY Health benefits for about 2,500 households potentially affected by the paperwork volume issue. For clients whose annual redetermination date is Sept. 1, benefits are being extended for at least one month.

At the same time, the Commissioner is ordering the protective extension of benefits for about 13,000 households enrolled in the federal SNAP program, formerly known as food stamps.

The extensions are temporary, pending full eligibility redetermination.

“Essentially, this means that the approximately 15,500 DSS client households receiving service cutoff warning notices in August will not lose Medicaid/HUSKY Health or SNAP benefits in September, as the notices had indicated,” Commissioner Bremby said.

Altogether, DSS serves approximately 750,000 Connecticut residents.

To help relieve pressure on the eligibility system, Commissioner Bremby is asking clients to:

- Open an online benefits account at www.connect.ct.gov, if internet access is available. This enables clients to self-serve and get information about their benefits online, 24/7.
- Call the DSS client information line and benefits center at 1-855-6-CONNECT to use an interactive-voice response line to self-serve. Clients can set up a phone benefits account to self-serve, 24/7.
- Call the client information line and benefits center if there is a need to speak to a DSS worker, but avoiding peak times is recommended. Avoiding Mondays and the end of business days, if possible, is recommended. The agency is working to reduce call-wait times through reevaluation of how existing staffing is deployed.
- Use mail (not fax) when sending documentation to DSS. The address is: DSS ConneCT Scanning Center, PO Box 1320, Manchester, CT 06045-1320.

“While we are seeing an overall improvement in access to the department and our services by many thousands of Connecticut residents, we are also experiencing the perhaps inevitable growing pains of a major business process transformation,” Commissioner Bremby said.

However, it is also important to emphasize the positive impact to Connecticut residents, the Commissioner said: “To date, more than 26,000 DSS clients have created online benefit accounts. Nearly 41,000 phone benefit accounts have also been opened.

“As noted, we have also begun centralized document intake, scanning and electronic transmission to end the tidal wave of literally millions of pages of applications, redetermination forms and other documents flooding our offices,” Commissioner Bremby said. “Despite the volume issues, hundreds of thousands of pages have already been scanned and inputted for DSS processing. In the planning stage is the launch of online applications and change reporting, scheduled for this fall.”

In general, the launch of DSS service modernization has been a major step forward for clients and an agency previously mired in obsolete systems. Over the years, it was frequently impossible for DSS clients to reach workers at all through 12 obsolete and overwhelmed local phone systems, and there was no online or phone access to benefit accounts.

Nearing the two-month point of ConneCT implementation, over 400,000 calls have been handled through the new interactive voice-response phone system, with thousands of clients getting information from online or phone interactive voice-response systems without needing to speak to a worker. A new service eligibility pre-screening tool is also assisting clients and potential applicants at www.connect.ct.gov.

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