

Southern Center for Human Rights
83 Poplar Street, NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30303-2122
(404) 688-1202 Fax (404) 688-9440
E-mail: rights@schr.org Web Site: <http://www.schr.org>

Social Services - Georgia

The Southern Center for Human Rights represents prisoners in class action lawsuits that challenge unconstitutional and illegal practices and policies in prisons and jails. However, we know that your transition back into your community is a daunting task, and we want you to be prepared. Therefore, we have some suggestions and resources to help you make this important transition as smoothly as possible.

Getting Started

Readjusting to daily life after prison will not be easy. Many formerly incarcerated individuals want to know what it takes to avoid getting caught back up in the criminal justice system. Those who have made the transition suggest surrounding yourself with loving family members and friends who will help you lead a productive life; developing a new set of friends and support networks; and intentionally steering clear of those who led you to trouble in the first place. You will have a lot to think about with looking for employment, furthering your education, and finding a stable place to live. You may want to secure a driver's license, both for transportation and voting purposes. Contact your local DMV to find out the status of your past driver's license. It may be helpful to ask your prison counselor before you're released if they can provide a copy of your birth certificate and social security card. If they refuse and you need a copy of these records, you may contact:

Vital Records
2600 Skyland Drive, NE
Atlanta, GA 30319

Keep in mind that they charge \$10.00 for each copy.

SSI/SSD

Social Security Disability (SSD) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are federally funded programs that provide income benefits to disabled persons. The Social Security Administration defines a valid disability as a condition that makes the applicant unable to work to a significant degree for more than 12 months.

SSD benefits are paid to people who have recently worked, paid Social Security taxes, and are unable to work because of a serious medical condition that is expected to last at least a year or result in death. Benefits are based on your work history, the extent of the disability, and the number of yearly quarters that an applicant has worked. Generally, you must have worked and paid Social Security taxes for 10 years to be eligible.

SSI provides monthly benefits to people with limited income and resources, who are disabled, blind, or age 65 or older and who either do not receive enough income under SSD or do not qualify for SSD benefits. Unlike SSD, SSI is not based on whether or not you have worked and paid into Social Security.

It is possible to receive either SSD or SSI, or to receive both benefits. There is only one application for both. The application process begins with an interview, including information on medical diagnosis and proof of income and resources. You must call or

go to your local Social Security office to set up an interview. After the initial interview, you will be required to fill out a more in-depth application and documentation. You will need an original or certified copy of your birth certificate, your U.S. Military service papers (if you served in the military), your most recent W-2 forms (if you have worked), as much medical information (history, documents, medical files) as you can provide, and documentation of household income.

After the application documents have been reviewed, the Social Security office will review your medical records and arrange a physical examination and make a decision within 3-6 months. Once they decide to offer you benefits, there is a 5-month waiting period before the benefits will begin.

SSI/SSD benefits will not be provided while you are incarcerated. However, based on the Social Security Administration's Prerelease Procedure, you may begin the application process for benefits while still in prison if you expect to be released within the next 30 days. The Prerelease Procedure determines that you must contact your counselor or a social worker to let them know that you expect to be released within 30 days and would like to apply for SSI/SSD benefits. They must then call your local Social Security office to let them know that you appear to meet the eligibility requirements for SSI/SSD and are expected to be released soon, to provide current medical evidence and non-medical information for your claim, and to set up an appointment for you with a claims representative. After this has been done, the Social Security office will call you for your initial interview, and the application process will begin. Under the Prerelease Procedure, the Social Security Administration agrees to process your claim or reinstatement as quickly as possible and to notify your institution when your SSI determination has been made.

Be patient with the application process, as it is known to be long and tedious, with many dates and facts requested from you, an in-depth interview, and a medical examination. The main necessity is to explain how your disability hinders your normal functioning in life and your ability to work. If you have questions or need more information, you can call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213. The metro Atlanta office can be reached at:

Social Security Administration
Suite 2860
401 W. Peachtree Street
Atlanta, GA 30308

Healthcare

Medicaid/Medicare

Medicare is a health insurance program available to U.S. citizens who are at least 65 years old and have been employed at least 10 years in Medicare-covered employment. You might also qualify for coverage if you are a younger person with a disability or with end-stage renal disease (permanent kidney failure requiring dialysis or transplant). If you would like to find out if you are eligible or want to apply for Medicare, contact your local Social Security office.

Medicaid is another health insurance program, covering a wider range of individuals than Medicare. It is mainly available to low-income individuals and families, specifically those who are aged, disabled, pregnant, or have minors in the household. There are no additional eligibility requirements for formerly incarcerated individuals. The low-income Medicaid (LIM) program is for individuals whose income is less than \$500 a month. Medicaid does not pay money to the applicant; instead it sends payments directly to your health care providers. Those enrolled may also be asked to pay a small co-

payment for some medical services. To apply for Medicaid, you may download the application online from the Dept. of Family and Children Services (DFCS) website at <http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/> or you can contact your local DFCS office. There are many offices across Georgia. You may find the one nearest you by calling 1-800-869-1150.

Free and Reduced-cost Medical Clinics

There are a variety of clinics in Georgia that provide health care for individuals without health insurance. Clinics in the metro Atlanta, Augusta, Athens, and Savannah areas are listed below, with descriptions of the services they provide.

24/7 Gateway Center

275 Pryor Street
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 215-6600

Runs a clinic, in addition to multiple services for the homeless.

Good Samaritan Health Center

239 Ivan Allen Blvd
Atlanta, GA 30313
(404) 523-6571

Provides healthcare for Atlanta's working poor and homeless, including vaccinations, pre-natal care, well baby care, dental services, counseling, and health education. Sliding-scale fee.

Saint Joseph's Mercy Care Services, Inc.

Mercy Clinic Downtown
424 Decatur St.
Atlanta, GA 30312

(404) 880-3550; (404) 880-3600
Provides health services for low income individuals without health insurance, including primary health and dental care, HIV/AIDS primary care, HIV/AIDS prevention counseling and testing; and outreach and referrals for the homeless.

Visiting Nurse Health System of Metro Atlanta

6610 Bay Circle, Suite C
Norcross, GA 30071

24-hour health-related services including therapy, respite care, counseling, social work, pain management, day programs, AIDS treatment, and hospice care facilities.

Atlanta Community Access

Coalition/ACAC 99 Jesse Hill, Jr. Dr.
Atlanta, GA 30303

(404) 639-9933 ext. 322
Community-based healthcare services throughout Fulton/Dekalb Counties for uninsured and underinsured residents,

including a mobile dental unit which offers cleanings, fillings, extractions, tooth replacement, and dentures.

AID Atlanta - Grady Infectious Disease Clinic

341 Ponce de Leon Ave.
Atlanta, GA 30308
(404) 616-2440

Provides confidential HIV testing and treatment, as well as disease/disability information on HIV and AIDS.

Hands of Hope Clinic, Inc.

427 McGarity Rd.
McDonough, GA 30253
(770) 914-7400

Free Christian medical clinic at McDonough Presbyterian Church Monday evenings by appointment from 6:00-8:30 pm. Provides basic medical care and free medications as available to any resident of the county without Medicare/Medicaid or other insurance.

Athens Neighborhood Health Center

675 College Ave.
Athens, GA 30601
(706) 546-5526; (706) 357-9706 After Hours

Provides accessible, affordable, high quality primary health care to medically underserved, at risk individuals in Athens-Clarke County and surrounding areas.

Athens Nurses' Clinic

496 Reese St.
Athens, GA 30601

St. Vincent de Paul Health Clinic – Augusta

1384 Greene St.
Augusta, GA 30901
(706) 828-3444

A coalition of local care providers, offering acute health care services for

indigent persons. Non-insured patients are accepted.

University Health Care System
Center for Community Health
1448 Lee Beard Way
Augusta, GA 30901
(706) 828-7468

(706) 613-6976

This agency provides general medical services.

Inner City Night Shelter
124 Arnold St.
Savannah, GA 31401
(912) 232-4673
Provides a community clinic and shelter.
Walk-ins accepted.

Veteran Benefits

The Veterans' Administration (VA) offers a variety of benefits, including healthcare, pension and compensation, education, rehabilitation and employment, and other services to those who have formerly served in the U.S. Armed Forces. If you are a veteran, you may begin the application process from prison. You may receive benefits if you are on probation or parole.

It is easiest to fill out the application online, or have someone print it and send it to you. In order to apply, you must fill out the 10-10EZ form, provide a copy of your veteran's discharge/separation papers (called DD214), and attach your medical insurance information (if any) to the application, and send the entire application to the enrollment coordinator at the local VA medical center. To find your local VA center, you may contact the VA Administration at 678-924-5700. Once your application has been received, you should receive the results within 30-60 days. Once you have received your eligibility letter, you must contact your local VA healthcare center to set up an appointment for your initial visit.

There were no known eligibility restrictions or additional requirements for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Food Stamps

The food stamp program is designed to meet the nutritional needs of low-income individuals and families. Most people aged 18-60 must register to work or be required to participate in an employment and training program. Your household generally cannot have more than \$2,000 in resources, including cash, bank accounts, and other property. However, some exceptions are made. The individual and household must meet an income limit, which varies by household size and changes each year, and the amount of food stamps you will receive depends on your monthly income and rent, utility, and medical expenses. Contact your local food stamp office for specific information. If you receive SSI/SSD, the Social Security office will assist you with the food stamp application and send it in for you.

There are eligibility restrictions for formerly incarcerated individuals. The restrictions are as follows:

1. Individuals who were convicted of a drug-related felony on or after August 22, 1996 are permanently disqualified from the food stamp program, and the amount of food stamps paid to their family or household will be reduced.
2. Individuals fleeing to avoid prosecution, custody or confinement for a felony are disqualified from the program until they are no longer fleeing.
3. Individuals in violation of their probation or parole are disqualified from receiving food stamps until they are no longer considered in violation of their parole/probation.

Those individuals who meet the above conditions *but* have been granted first offender status are not subject to the above disqualifications.

In order to apply, you must present proof of identification, income and expenses, rent receipts, records of utility costs, and medical bills. You may fill out an application online on the Food and Nutrition Service website at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/states/georgia.htm>. Your local library will likely have computers that you may use. Alternatively, you may call your local food stamp office to have the application mailed to you, or go in to the office to pick it up. There are a number of food stamp offices in Georgia. The state hotline can help you locate the office nearest you.

Georgia State Information/Hotline Number:
1-800-869-1150 (outside the metro area)
(404) 657-9358 (inside metro area)

After returning your application to the local office, you should find out if you're eligible within 30 days. If you need food in the meantime, please contact:

Atlanta Community Food Bank
970 Jefferson Street
Atlanta, GA 30318-5236
<http://www.acfb.org/>
kathy.palumbo@acfb.org
(404) 892-FEED

Employment

Finding a job and legitimate source of income can be a challenging part of re-entry. The Georgia Department of Labor is tasked with assisting Georgia residents with finding viable employment. Their website posts job opportunities throughout the State. They also have career centers in various cities that provide individuals seeking employment tools to find and keep a job. The one-stop centers provide additional educational and employment resources. Please contact the Dept. of Labor at (404) 232-3515 for more information about their employment services.

When seeking employment, please keep in mind that the federal government offers an incentive to employers that hire formerly incarcerated individuals. You may want to ask the Dept. of Labor for more information and for tips on how to let your potential employer know about this incentive.

The Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) also has an employment program called "Corporate Take 5". This program is designed to connect recently released individuals with employment at major corporations. The GDC also has a number of prerelease and transitional centers, which put inmates to work while they are still in custody. It may be helpful to ask your counselor how you can get involved in these programs, or have a loved one contact the Director of Reentry Services or the Ombudsman office at:

A.J. Sabree
Director of Reentry Services
(404) 463-6506

Office of the Ombudsman and Family Advocacy
2 MLK Jr. Drive, S.E.
Suite 954, East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334
(404) 657-7588

We hope that this information is helpful to you, and we wish you the best.