



Social Security

Entering the
Community After
Incarceration—
How We Can Help

www.socialsecurity.gov

Entering the Community After Incarceration— How We Can Help

Social Security and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits are suspended when people are confined to jail or prison.

- For Social Security beneficiaries, benefits remain suspended until the inmate is released.
- For SSI beneficiaries, benefits are terminated when the person is incarcerated for a year or more.

People need funds to cover living expenses when they're released from prison. To help them make a successful transition back into the community, benefits need to be started as soon as possible.

How soon can benefits be started after release?

The amount of time it takes to start benefits depends on the person's situation:

- If Social Security benefits were only suspended, Social Security can usually restart them without much delay;
- If benefits were terminated, benefits can take a few months to resume; and
- If the inmate wasn't previously entitled or eligible for benefits, and is alleging a disability, or SSI benefits were terminated a new application and disability determination are required.

In this situation, a decision about the person's disability could take from three to five months.

Is there a way to expedite benefit payments?

By following a special procedure before release, we can pay benefits much sooner. We refer to this as the prerelease procedure.

How does the prerelease procedure work?

When an institution has a prerelease agreement with Social Security, we can:

- Begin processing an inmate's application up to several months before the inmate's scheduled release date;
- Make a prospective determination of potential eligibility and payment amount based on the inmate's expected circumstances after release; and
- Start paying benefits shortly after the inmate is released from the institution.

When notified by the institution, Social Security will follow this procedure if the inmate is likely to be eligible for benefits within 30 days of his or her scheduled release date.

How can institutions establish a prerelease agreement?

Either the local Social Security office or the institution may initiate a discussion about setting up a prerelease agreement.

The prerelease agreement:

- May be an informal verbal agreement; or
- May be a written agreement signed by both parties.

What are the responsibilities of each party?

Social Security's responsibilities

In a typical prerelease agreement, the Social Security office will:

- Provide guidelines about what evidence is needed;
- Provide a contact person to assist the institution and the inmate in applying the prerelease procedures;
- Process claims and reinstatements in a timely manner; and
- Notify the institution promptly when Social Security has made a decision about the inmate's eligibility for benefits.

Institution's responsibilities

The institution will agree to:

- Notify Social Security of people scheduled for release in the near future who may be eligible for benefits;
- Provide available current medical evidence or nonmedical information for the inmate including a statement about the inmate's ability to handle funds;
- Provide Social Security with the anticipated release date; and
- Notify Social Security as soon as the inmate is released or changes that delay the release date.

What are the advantages of a prerelease agreement?

A prerelease agreement:

- Allows both parties to streamline the process for starting/restarting benefits promptly after an inmate is released; and
- Facilitates the inmate's return to the community by providing him/her with an adequate source of income.

Contacting Social Security

Visit www.socialsecurity.gov *anytime to* apply for benefits, open a **my Social Security** account, find publications, and get answers to frequently asked questions. Or, call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer case-specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Generally, you'll have a shorter wait time if you call after Tuesday. We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service, so a second Social Security representative monitors some telephone calls. We can provide general information by automated phone service 24 hours a day. And, remember, our website, www.socialsecurity.gov, is available to you anytime and anywhere!



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