How Do I Recertify for Public Assistance?

WHAT IS RECERTIFICATION?

Every person who receives public assistance benefits must renew these benefits at least once a year. The government calls this process “recertification” and it must be done promptly in order to continue to receive benefits. Some people may need to recertify every six months. **If you do not complete recertification, you will lose your public assistance benefits.**

You will receive a notice in the mail from your local department of social services (if you live in New York city the notice will come from the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA). This “recertification notice” should arrive approximately 75-90 days before your benefits are set to expire and will provide you with details for your recertification interview, also called a "face-to-face." You may get more than one notice like this within a given year. If you get a recertification notice in the mail you must go to the appointment, even if it’s been less than a year since your last one.

The recertification notice must tell you the place, date, and time of your appointment, how to get there, what documents to bring, and what will happen if you miss your appointment. Sometimes the notice will also tell you who to report to once you get there. If you have previously provided the HRA with documents that never change, like your birth certificate or social security card, you do not have to keep bringing them in to each appointment.

When you receive your appointment notice for the face-to-face interview you will also receive your “recertification application”. This application is how you will recertify your public assistance benefits. Fill out the application, noting any changes in your household--for example, changes in income, gaining or losing a household member, and owing back rent--and any special needs you may have, including any language issues you may have. Be sure to SIGN AND DATE the application and bring it to your interview. Make a copy for yourself.

WHAT HAPPENS AT A FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW?

Report to your interview at the specified time and place. You will meet with your caseworker or another HRA person. **Write down the name of the person who meets with you if his/her name wasn’t on your recertification notice.**

The caseworker should make copies of your documents and return the originals to you. Bring a list of every document you bring to your interview so that you can make sure you get them all back. Make sure that BOTH SIDES of each document are copied.

If you are unable to get any of the documents or any of the information that HRA has requested, HRA must give you a reasonable amount of time to obtain it. If you aren’t going to be able to get this information (for example, because you don’t have money to pay the fee for a birth certificate), be sure to say so, both on your application and at your interview, and ask for help. HRA must help you obtain documents that you are having difficulty obtaining on your own.

You may also be required to attend an additional appointment with HRA’s Eligibility Verification Review (EVR) Unit. If you need to have an EVR appointment you will be notified to report to the EVR Unit either by your caseworker, who will give you a form to take to your EVR interview, or by a notice sent directly to your home from the EVR office.
WHAT HAPPENS AT AN EVR APPOINTMENT?

The EVR appointment gives the HRA a chance to make sure you are eligible for benefits. At your EVR appointment, you will be asked a series of questions. The EVR interviewer will want to know your present work status, your past work history and education, why you are applying for benefits, if you have applied for other government benefits, and if you owe any rent. Even though you may have already given this information to other people at HRA, you must give it to your EVR caseworker as well.

The EVR caseworker may compare the information you provided about bank accounts, employment income (no matter how small), and unemployment insurance records to what's in their computer and question you about them. The caseworker may check the computer before you get there or while you are there. Be sure to tell the worker about any changes in family income or size. At the end of the interview, the EVR worker will give you a signed form to bring back to your Welfare Center.

If the caseworker is satisfied by the interview, the EVR Unit will send investigators to your home. You will not be told when they will come. If you are not home when the investigators arrive, they are supposed to leave a note with a telephone number so you can call to reschedule another visit. You will not be told when they are coming back.

Always call the number on the note to reschedule a visit if you were not home. Your call is recorded, so no one can claim later that you did not call. You can leave a message in English or in Spanish. Making that call may prove critically important if a problem arises.

EVR investigators have the power to make important decisions about your public assistance benefits, various other benefits, and whether or not you will receive help with utility cut-offs or back rent problems. Be sure to tell EVR about any special needs you might have, even if they do not ask you about this and even if you have already listed them on previous public assistance or recertification applications.

HRA will send you a notice in the mail that will tell you the result of the EVR investigation. This note will tell you that your benefits will be continued, reduced, increased, or denied. If you disagree with anything in these notices, ask for a fair hearing immediately. Save the envelope that the notice came in and staple it to the notice.

HOW DO I GET A FAIR HEARING?

You will receive a notice of the HRA’s decision in your case. Read it carefully. If you disagree with their decision, you must ask for a fair hearing immediately, VERY SHORT TIME LIMITS EXIST. If the HRA decides to terminate or reduce your benefits, you must ask for a fair hearing within 10 days of the date of the notice in order to have your benefits continue unchanged until the hearing.

You can ask for a fair hearing in one of three ways:

1. CALL 1-800-342-3334 (toll free) or (212) 417-6550, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Have the notice that you disagree with in front of you when you call. The best time is first thing in the morning at 8:00, since the phone is very busy after 9:00.

2. WRITE a letter to the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Fair Hearings Unit, 40 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY 12243, and attach your letter to a copy of the notice that you disagree with. Keep copies of everything that you send.

3. GO IN PERSON to 14 Boerum Place, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Take with you a copy of the notice that you disagree with.