

TICKET TO WORK

A BENEFICIARY'S GUIDE

Alternative Formats Of This And Other PABSS Publications Are Available Upon Request.

AM I ELIGIBLE FOR THE 'TICKET TO WORK' PROGRAM?

To be eligible you must be at least age 18, have not attained age 65, and receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits.

You are NOT eligible for this program if:

- Your medical condition is expected to improve (“Medical Improvement Expected” status) & you have NOT had at least one “Continuing Disability Review (CDR);”
- You are a childhood SSI beneficiary who is age 18 but you have NOT yet had an “Age 18 Redetermination” under the adult disability standard;
- You are receiving “presumptive” disability payments;
- You are receiving “temporary benefits” while awaiting an “Expedited Reinstatement of Benefits” (EXR) decision; or
- You are receiving benefits while appealing a Social Security Administration (SSA) termination based on medical improvement.

WHAT IS THE TICKET TO WORK AND WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999?

The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 is federal legislation that was enacted on December 17, 1999. Under this law the Social Security Administration (SSA) hopes to achieve the following three goals:

1. To provide more Americans with disabilities the opportunity to work and decrease their dependence on public benefits;
2. To increase SSI/SSDI beneficiaries' choice in obtaining rehabilitation, vocational, or support services to help obtain, regain or maintain employment; and
3. To remove barriers that requires individuals with disabilities to choose between government-provided health care coverage and work (that may not provide health care benefits).

The Social Security Administration's toll free number is **1-800-772-1213** and website is <http://www.socialsecurity.gov> . As a result of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, the Social Security Administration has developed agreements with various entities to help implement the Act. Below is a list of the entities and a brief description of their roles.

MAXIMUS

Under contract with the Social Security Administration, MAXIMUS, Inc., a private company

- provides information about the Ticket to Work Program,
- operates a toll-free telephone line to answer questions about the Ticket to Work Program,
- maintains the database for Employment Networks (discussed in further detail below), and
- maintains a list of assigned tickets and can send out tickets.

Eligible individuals, who have not yet received a ticket or have misplaced their ticket, may call MAXIMUS and request a ticket. You can also request an Employment Network Directory for your zip code or search their database at <http://www.yourtickettowork.com/endir>. When your ticket has been assigned, MAXIMUS will send you confirmation. You can also call MAXIMUS to verify your ticket assignment. To receive a more comprehensive understanding of the Ticket to Work Program and to have specific questions answered, please contact MAXIMUS at 1-866-968-7842 (TDD 1-866-833-2967) or visit the SSA web site at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work>.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE TICKET TO WORK PROGRAM?

1. SSA will not conduct a medical Continuing Disability Reviews (CDR's) while you are using your ticket.
2. You will have access to Employment Networks. You can take advantage of the services offered by Employment Networks at no cost to you.

HOW DOES THE TICKET TO WORK PROGRAM OPERATE?

1. Tickets are mailed to eligible beneficiaries. Ticket use is voluntary. **YOU DO NOT HAVE TO USE THE TICKET OR ATTEMPT TO WORK IF YOU DO NOT CHOOSE TO.** Below is a sample ticket:

Social Security Administration

Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency

Ticket Number: 23-45-5789TW

Claim Account Number: 987654321 W

Issue Date:

This ticket is issued to you by the Social Security Administration under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program. If you want help in returning to work or going to work for the first time, you may offer this ticket to an Employment Network of your choosing or take it to your State vocational rehabilitation agency for services. If you choose an Employment Network and it agrees to take your ticket, or if you choose your State agency and you qualify for services, these providers can offer you services to help you go to work.

An Employment Network provides the services allocated to you. The Social Security Administration will pay the Employment Network if you assign your ticket to it, and the Employment Network helps you go to work and complies with other requirements of the Program. An Employment Network serving under the Program has agreed to abide by the rules and regulations of the Program under the terms of its agreement with the Social Security Administration for providing services under the Program. Your State agency can tell you about its rates for getting services.

James G. Spivey
Commissioner of Social Security

2. To participate in this program you must assign your ticket to an Employment Network (EN) or the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). The EN/OVR role is explained in more detail below.

3. The Employment Network (EN) and you must agree upon and sign an Individual Work Plan (IWP) or the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and you must agree upon and sign an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) before your ticket may be assigned. Your plan spells out exactly what the EN/OVR and you will do to achieve your employment. **YOU SHOULD ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROCESS!** You have the power to decide with the EN/OVR what your plan will say and to change or modify your plan so that it is satisfactory to you. You do not have to sign a plan if it does not adequately provide for your needs. The ticket cannot be assigned without your approval.
4. If you cannot agree with the EN/OVR on a plan, you may try to place your ticket with another EN/OVR. Your ticket is not *officially* assigned with the EN/OVR until the plan is submitted to MAXIMUS and approved.
5. You may want to contact MAXIMUS to verify that your ticket has been assigned.

Employment Networks

An Employment Network (EN) is a service provider that helps beneficiaries seek employment and job training opportunities and work support services. For a list of ENs contact MAXIMUS. ENs may provide pre and post employment services to eligible SSI and SSDI ticket holders who choose to go to work. ENs can offer a variety of essential job placement, vocational rehabilitation, job preparation and skills training, support, and retention services in order for beneficiaries to be successful in the workplace. You may use your ticket to obtain services from any EN. The EN may not charge a fee to serve you. If an EN attempts to charge you, contact MAXIMUS at the numbers provided above or the PABSS Project at the numbers provided below. As explained below, the EN will be paid by SSA if you achieve the goals stated in your work plan and your work makes you ineligible for cash benefits.

CAN I CHOOSE THE OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (OVR) TO BE MY EMPLOYMENT NETWORK?

Yes. OVR can provide employment, training, and support services to beneficiaries under the Ticket to Work Program. (The State VR agency, OVR, can choose to serve a beneficiary with a ticket and either be paid as an EN, or be paid under the traditional cost reimbursement system. OVR is “acting as an EN” only in the first situation.) Before OVR provides services to you under the Ticket to Work Program, they must decide if you are eligible to receive its services under the federal Rehabilitation Act. If you **ARE NOT** already receiving services from OVR when you receive a ticket, then you can decide whether or not to assign the ticket to OVR. If you are already receiving services from OVR when you receive a ticket, then your ticket will automatically be assigned to OVR when OVR advises MAXIMUS that you are working with OVR. (This is an important distinction!!) **You are advised to check with OVR on the status of your ticket assignment.** Remember that you and OVR *must* agree upon and sign an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) before your ticket may be assigned to OVR.

If you disagree with an OVR decision regarding your Individual Plan for Employment or are unhappy with the services they provide, you have the options of:

1. Sending an appeal letter to:
Bureau of Program Operations
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Rm. 1310, Labor & Industry Building
Seventh & Forester Streets
Harrisburg, PA 17120
2. Contacting the Client Assistance Program (CAP), which provides free assistance to OVR clients who have a dispute with OVR. Contact CAP to file a written request for a hearing within 30 days. Their toll-free number is: 1-888-745-2357; TDD: 215-557-7112 or visit their website at www.equalemployment.org.

HOW DO I CHOOSE AN EMPLOYMENT NETWORK OTHER THAN OVR?

1. Obtain a list of Employment Networks (ENs) from MAXIMUS. Be aware that this list changes all the time. So consider checking back periodically and keeping records of your contacts with ENs.
2. Call all the ENs in your area to find out if they provide services to persons with your disability, what services they provide, and if they provide services in your geographic area. Do some investigation before deciding on a service provider that will best meet your employment, training, and/or support needs. Take this opportunity to discuss your employment goals and ask questions about how they can help you reach your goals.
3. Employment Networks often provide a variety of services, so when you call an EN, ask to speak to a staff person who deals with the Ticket to Work Program. Tell them you have a ticket and may be interested in placing it with their agency. The EN will ask you questions to find out about your employment goals to determine whether their services will match your needs. Pick an EN you feel comfortable working with and who can best help you reach your goals. *Do not feel pressured to decide on an EN immediately.*
4. Accepting a ticket is completely voluntary on the part of the EN. Don't be discouraged if an EN decides not to accept your ticket. There may be many reasons why an EN chooses not to serve you and it may have nothing to do with your ability to work. This is why it is important for you to contact all the ENs serving your area.
5. ENs only get reimbursed by SSA for serving you if your work income eventually makes you ineligible for cash benefits because you earn over the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) level. The 2007 SGA amount is \$900.00 per month for beneficiaries who are not blind and \$1500.00 per month for beneficiaries who are blind.

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

The Ticket to Work legislation authorized the Social Security Administration to award cooperative agreements to a variety of community organizations to provide Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA). These independent WIPA Projects provide SSA beneficiaries with disabilities (including transition-to-work aged youth) access to benefits planning and assistance services. They deliver customer-friendly analysis of the impact of earned income on cash benefits and related health care. The goal of the WIPA Project is to better enable SSA's beneficiaries with disabilities to make informed choices about work.

Each Project has Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWIC) who will 1) provide work incentives planning and assistance; 2) conduct outreach efforts to those beneficiaries (and their families), who are potentially eligible to participate in Federal or State work incentives programs; and 3) work in cooperation with Federal, State, and private agencies and nonprofit organizations that serve beneficiaries with disabilities.

In Pennsylvania, there are three organizations that provide these services.

1. AHEDD, 3300 Trindle Road, Camp Hill, PA 17011, <http://ahedd.org/ssi.html> , john.miller@ahedd.org Service Counties:
866-627-8610: Cameron, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango, Warren.
866-802-4333: Armstrong, Fayette, Greene, Washington, Westmoreland.
866-302-4333: Allegheny, Beaver, Butler.
866-889-4281: Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon, Indiana, Jefferson, Somerset.
2. Goodwill Industries - PASSABCO, 1150 Goodwill Drive, Harrisburg, PA 17105, 866-541-7005, http://www.yourgoodwill.org/individuals/benefits_planning.html , corey@passabco.com Service Counties: Adams, Berks, Bradford, Carbon, Centre, Chester, Clearfield, Clinton, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Juniata, Lackawanna, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Luzerne, Lycoming, Mifflin, Monroe, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Perry, Pike, Porter, Schuylkill, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne, Wyoming, and York
3. Transition to Employment Program, Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania, 1414 N. Cameron Street, Suite C, Harrisburg, PA 17103, 800-692-7443 ext. 309, <http://www.drnpa.org> , ibarol@drnpa.org Service Counties: Bucks, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia

Protection & Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security

The Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) projects are funded by the Social Security Administration to protect the rights of Social Security Beneficiaries in their efforts to obtain work, return to work, and/or maintain work. These projects are usually located within the state Disability Rights Network agencies that are a nationwide network of congressionally mandated, legally-based disability rights agencies. In Pennsylvania, PABSS services are provided through Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania (DRN) at (800) 692-7443, (877) 375-7139 (TTY) Website: <http://www.drnpa.org> . If you are a Social Security Beneficiary contacting DRN about a barrier-to-work issue, you will be referred to the PABSS Project. The PABSS Project maintains resource information under employment publications at <http://www.drnpa.org/publications/employment> .

The PABSS Project provides information, referral, outreach, and advocacy to help you access necessary services to obtain, maintain or regain employment, training, and support. Free advice is available from PABSS to discuss any questions about services you are receiving under the Ticket to Work program, disputes with Employment Networks, OVR, employers (including reasonable accommodation and disability discrimination issues) or other entities involved in your return to work effort.

Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania is an independent, nonprofit agency mandated by the federal government to protect and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. Several federal Acts mandate DRN's existence and authorize it to investigate abuse, neglect and rights violations; require the agency to be independent and free of conflicts; and authorize the agency may take any necessary steps to resolve issues. The Disability Rights Network agencies also devote considerable resources to ensuring full access to inclusive educational programs, financial entitlements, health care, accessible housing and productive employment opportunities. If you are experiencing discrimination related to your disability or have questions regarding the rights and services related to your disability, then you should contact DRN.

DRN should be considered a primary source of support to anyone in the state of Pennsylvania whose goal is to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Assistance may be provided to consumers, families of consumers, professionals, local service providers, county and state agencies, advocates, and any others that contact the agency. DRN provides information, referrals, and technical assistance with the intent to promote consumer empowerment and assist consumers with self-advocacy, to assist consumers in obtaining appropriate services, and to promote total inclusion of consumers in the general public.

DRN provides options to all people who call and provides case advocacy to individuals and groups if their issues are related to the agency's established priorities. Case services may include mediation, negotiation, investigation, and litigation. Although DRN is consumer directed, it also provides assistance to the public-at-large for the benefit of persons with disabilities. In addition, the Disability Rights Network agencies interact with elected and appointed officials to share information which will assist policy makers in making legislative and administrative changes which benefit persons with disabilities. Groups may request training/education regarding numerous issues including abuse, neglect, rights violation, and advocacy. Additional information about the Disability Rights Network can be obtained from the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN at <http://www.ndrn.org>).

Virginia Commonwealth University Benefits Assistance Resource Center

The Social Security Administration has an agreement with the Virginia Commonwealth University Benefits Assistance Resource Center (VCU-BARC) to provide training and technical support to WIPA Projects and PABSS Projects on the operations of the Social Security disability benefit programs (SSI and SSDI) and all associated work incentives. You can also use their website resources, which are reliable and helpful. Their website is <http://www.vcu-barc.org>.

Cornell University In addition to contracting with the Virginia Commonwealth University, the Social Security Administration has contracted with Cornell University to provide technical assistance and training to WIPA Projects on SSA's disability programs and work incentives, the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and on other Federal work incentives programs. You can also use their website resources, which are reliable and helpful. Their website is <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi>.

IF AND WHEN YOU CHOOSE TO USE YOUR TICKET:

1. Know about the public benefits you currently receive. Examples of public benefits include:
 - Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income;
 - Medicare and/or Medicaid;
 - Federal or state housing subsidies;
 - State, County or Municipal Benefits, such as: Food Stamps, Cash Assistance, Housing or Transportation Assistance.
 2. Meet with the Community Work Incentive Coordinator (CWIC) assigned to your county to learn about ways to pursue work while protecting your cash and health care benefits. Refer to the WIPA section above to locate the CWIC serving your county. Tell the CWIC about the benefits you already receive so s/he may make an accurate assessment of your situation and provide you with appropriate advice. A CWIC will help determine how your work income will affect your various benefits.
- WIPA services are free and you are allowed to access these services whether or not you are using your ticket and whether or not you are receiving assistance from PABSS. If you have a dispute regarding WIPA services you may ask PABSS to help resolve the dispute.
3. Use the resources available to you. The Ticket to Work Program was designed by Congress to allow you to test your ability to work while continuing to receive cash and health care benefits and gradually become self-supporting. The Social Security Administration (SSA) has created a special "Worksite" page, <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work> , containing useful information about returning to work, including descriptions of the various work incentives available under SSI and SSDI. The SSA, WIPA, and PABSS can talk to you about these other available work incentives:

For SSI Beneficiaries:

- Continued Medicaid (MA) coverage (also called section 1619(b)) even if your earnings cause your SSI cash benefits to terminate if you cannot afford similar medical care and depend on Medicaid in order to work;
- Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS); PASS lets disabled individual set aside money and/or things he or she owns to pay for items or services needed to achieve a specific work goal. You must complete SSA's form and have it accepted.
- Expedited Reinstatement of Benefits (EXR);
- Work Expenses Related to your Disability (work expenses do not have to be related to your disability if you are a blind SSI beneficiary);
- Continuation of SSI for beneficiaries who recover from a disabling condition while in an SSA-approved rehabilitation or training program (also called Section 301);
- For students with disabilities: a monthly Student Earned Income Exclusion of up to \$1,510 (\$6,100 annual maximum) for 2007; and most scholarships or grants used to pay for tuition, books, and other educational expenses do not count as income if you are in school or a training program.

For SSDI Beneficiaries:

- Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE);
- Blind Work Expense (BWE);
- Trial Work Period (TWP);
- Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE);
- Expedited Reinstatement of Benefits (EXR);
- Continuation of Medicare coverage;
- State payment of Medicare premiums for low-income beneficiaries;
- Continuation of SSDI for beneficiaries who recover from a disabling condition while in an SSA-approved rehabilitation or training program;
- Income Averaging;
- Subsidy;
- Unsuccessful Work Attempt

4. Determine what employment services you will need in order to go to work at a level where you will eventually become self-sufficient. Consider the following: Assistance to determine a Vocational Goal, Assistance in exploring career opportunities, Education or further training, Interviewing Skills, Job Development, Transportation, Assistive Technology, Job Coaching, and Professional, Peer or Natural Supports to help you to keep a job.

5. Work Toward Your Goal

- Once your ticket is assigned to an EN or to OVR, concentrate on following your Individual Work Plan (IWP) with the EN or Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) with OVR;
- SSA will measure your progress under the IWP or the IPE to see if you are using your ticket. As long as you are using your ticket and making progress under your IWP or IPE, SSA will not conduct a Continuing Disability Review (CDR) to determine whether you are still disabled;
- There is no requirement to work during the first 24 months of your IWP or IPE as long as you are actively following your work plan with the EN or OVR;
- During months 25-36 of your plan, you must earn a gross income over the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) level (see above) for at least 3 months out of a 12 month period. During months 37 through 48 of your plan, you must earn a gross income over the SGA for at least 6 out of the 12 months. During months 49-60 of the plan, you must have a gross income that disqualifies you from receiving SSDI or SSI cash benefits;
- If you do not meet these goals of timely progress, it does not mean that you will be withdrawn from the Ticket to Work Program or that you will lose your benefits. If SSA decides that you have not met these goals, you could be subject to a Continuing Disability Review (CDR). If SSA decides after the CDR that you are no longer disabled, you may lose your benefits at that point.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS IF I AM NOT RECEIVING QUALITY SERVICES UNDER THE TICKET TO WORK PROGRAM?

If you are dissatisfied with the services you are receiving, contact the Disability Rights Network agency listed above. They will assist you in using the various dispute resolution systems or discuss the positives and negatives of changing Employment Networks (EN's). In general, you have the following options:

1. You may choose to utilize the Ticket to Work dispute resolution system created by SSA. Contact MAXIMUS at the numbers listed above to initiate a complaint about an EN; or
2. You may choose to utilize the EN (or OVR) internal grievance procedures required by the Ticket to Work regulations (20 CFR 411.600 to 411.635). Additionally, you may pull your ticket from your chosen EN (or OVR) provider. If you pull your ticket you may try to reassign the ticket with another EN. You may take as much time as you want to find another EN but you should try to do so within 90 days. After 90 days, SSA will consider your ticket no longer active and you may be subject to a Continuing Disability Review (CDR) until your ticket is reassigned. Be aware that another EN does not have to accept your ticket if it chooses not to.
3. You may choose to utilize the Client Assistance Program for concerns about OVR services. See information on page 4 on how to contact the CAP.

REMEMBER, THIS PROGRAM IS ABOUT CHOICE! THE PABSS AND THE WIPA PROJECTS EXIST TO HELP YOU BY PROVIDING INFORMATION AND ADVICE TO ENABLE YOU TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT WORK.

OTHER WORK INCENTIVES

Some provisions of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, which are not limited to individuals participating in the Ticket to Work Program:

- If you are a working SSDI beneficiary you may receive Medicare Part A premium-free hospital insurance coverage for an extended period of approximately 8 ½ years if you remain disabled during that time;
- The Ticket to Work legislation also created the option for states to expand Medicaid coverage for workers with disabilities under a “buy-in” program. Pennsylvania’s program is called Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD). For more information on MAWD please contact your local County Assistance Office (CAO) [check the “Blue Pages” section of your telephone book] or call the Department of Public Welfare help line at 1-800-692-7462 or (TDD) 1-800-451-5886 or visit their website at <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/disable/medicalassist/003670301.htm> . You can also contact your WIPA Project and/or PABSS Project for information;
- If you work at a level that causes you to lose your cash benefits and then become unable to work again because of your disability, you may request Expedited Reinstatement of Benefits (EXR) rather than reapplying for benefit status. A request for EXR must be made within 5 years from the month your cash benefits ended and your cash benefits must have ended because you worked and had earnings. While SSA determines whether or not you can get benefits again, SSA can give you provisional (temporary) benefits for up to 6 months.

You do not have to be a Ticket to Work participant in order to contact and obtain services from SSA, MAXIMUS, a WIPA Project, and/or a PABSS Project.

DRN uses Language Line as an interpreter services for persons who are non-English speaking. When you call DRN the person answering the phone may not speak your language. Please, state the language that you speak and wait a few minutes until you can be transferred to an interpreter. You will hear music in the background until the interpreter is connected.

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