



# Washington Public Assistance for Victims of Trafficking

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❖ Read this only if you live in the state of Washington.

❖ You can find all the fact sheets we link to here at [WashingtonLawHelp.org](http://WashingtonLawHelp.org).

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## What is trafficking?

The [Trafficking Victims Protection Act](#) defines sex trafficking as a commercial sex act **induced by force, fraud, or coercion**, or where the person made to perform such act is not yet 18 years old. **Coercion** can mean pressure or intimidation.

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❖ Your intimate partner (boyfriend or spouse) or a relative may have recruited you into commercial sex acts.

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Traffickers often

- Control your finances
- Control when and where you can sleep
- Control what and how much you can eat (controlling you through starvation)
- Isolate you from your friends, family, children
- Constantly monitor you (watch and follow you, keep track of all your movements)
- Threaten to expose you and ruin your reputation
- Threaten violence or commit acts of violence against your loved ones
- Threaten violence or commit acts of violence against you



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- Take away your passport and ID
- Physically lock you in the building where they are holding you

## What are my immigration options?

You may be eligible to get a T visa if you can show all these:

- You are in the U.S. because of trafficking.
- You have not refused unreasonably to cooperate in investigation of the trafficking (if you are at least 15 years old).
- You would suffer unusual and severe harm if deported.

If granted a T visa, you can apply for lawful permanent resident (“green card”) status after 3 years of continuous presence in the U.S.

You also may be eligible to get other types of immigration relief, including a U visa for crime victims. U visa holders can apply for lawful permanent residence after 3 years of continuous presence in the U.S.

If you have questions about your eligibility for immigration relief, contact the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project at their office nearest you:

- **Seattle:** (800) 445-5771
- **Tacoma:** (206) 816-3893
- **Asotin, Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield, Kittitas, Klickitat, Walla Walla Whitman & Yakima counties:** (888) 756-3641
- **Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane & Stevens counties:** (866) 271-2084

## I was trafficked. Am I eligible to get public assistance?

**Yes, if you are over age 18 and you get a letter from a “certifying agency” certifying you as a trafficking victim to be eligible to get public assistance.**

A “certifying agency” can be

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- The prosecuting attorney
- Law enforcement
- State patrol
- An Office of Administrative Hearings office
- Washington Department of Labor & Industries (L&I)
- Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)

## I am under age 18. Do I need certification?

**No.** You do not need a letter from a certifying agency to be eligible to get public assistance. You just need a child eligibility letter from U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) showing you are eligible to get benefits. If you do not have a certification letter or child eligibility letter, talk to a legal aid lawyer.

## I have a certification or child eligibility letter. What benefits can I get?

You may be eligible to get **federal benefits**, including:

- Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—read [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\): The Basics](#) or [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) for Teen Parents](#)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)—visit [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\) Overview](#) at [www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-over-ussi.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-over-ussi.htm) to learn more
- Medicaid (Apple Health), including refugee, emergency, pre-natal and children's health programs—read [How to Apply for Washington Apple Health \(Medicaid\)](#)

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❖ **New in 2021:** If you are getting Apple Health postpartum care (coverage for after the birth of your child) on or up to a year after the end of the COVID-19 federal health emergency, you will get that care for one year after the birth of your child.

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- Food Stamps—read [Do You Need Food Assistance Right Away?](#)
- Help with out-of-pocket costs for health insurance bought through the state Health Benefits Exchange (“Healthplanfinder”)—read [Qualified Health Plans](#)

You may also be eligible to get **state benefits**, including Aged Blind & Disabled (ABD)—cash and medical coverage for persons 65 and older, disabled, or blind, who meet other requirements. Read [Help for People Unable to Work: ABD and HEN](#).

## **I need welfare benefits. I do not speak English. What should I do?**

The welfare office must provide you with a free interpreter right away. You should put on the application form if you have a hard time reading, speaking, or understanding English.

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- ❖ The office should also send you translated notices about your benefits so you can read about your rights and responsibilities in your own language. Keep a copy of the letters the welfare office sends you. If you have not gotten interpreters or notices in your own language and the welfare office has cut off your benefits, you may be able to get your benefits back.
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## **Can I get SSI?**

**Maybe.** If you are a trafficking victim, you are eligible to get SSI for 7 years. After that, you probably have to become a U.S. citizen to remain eligible. Talk to a legal aid lawyer about your situation. (See contact info below.)

## **I get cash assistance. Will this keep me from getting lawful permanent residence or becoming a citizen?**

**No.** T visa holders can use public assistance, including cash, food, and medical, and still be eligible to get a green card and U.S. citizenship.

However, if you get benefits fraudulently, like by giving the welfare office false info about your income or family members, you may

- Not be able to naturalize.

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- Face other immigration consequences.

Try not to take trips outside the U.S. for more than 180 days. If you are gone longer, you may be denied re-entry into the U.S.

To learn more, talk to an immigration lawyer or read [Public Charge: What You Need to Know](#).

### **I have a sponsoring organization. Can the welfare office turn me down for assistance because of support the organization gave me?**

No. You still must report to DSHS any actual income your sponsoring organization has given you.

### **The welfare office denied my application. What can I do?**

The welfare office may have turned you down because you are not eligible for some reason. However, the rules are complicated. It is possible the welfare office made a mistake.

If you believe you are eligible, or would like another person to review your case, you should tell your worker that you want an “Administrative Hearing” or ask for a copy of the Hearing Request form to fill out. There is no fee or penalty for requesting an administrative hearing. You can withdraw your request later if you find out the welfare office was right. Read [I applied for benefits. DSHS said no](#) and talk to a legal aid lawyer.

### **What if I have a different immigration status?**

Read one of these instead:

- [Washington Public Assistance for Refugees and Other Humanitarian Entrants](#)
- [Public Charge: What You Need to Know](#)
- [Washington Public Assistance for “Lawfully Present” Non-Citizens](#)
- [Washington Public Assistance for Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence](#)



## Get Legal Help

- **Apply online** with [CLEAR\\*Online](https://www.nwjustice.org/apply-online) - [nwjustice.org/apply-online](https://www.nwjustice.org/apply-online)
- **Facing a legal issue in King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call 2-1-1 (or toll-free 1-877-211-9274) weekdays 8:00 am - 6:00 pm. They will refer you to a legal aid provider.
- **Facing a legal issue outside of King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays between 9:15 am - 12:15 pm or apply online at [nwjustice.org/apply-online](https://www.nwjustice.org/apply-online).
- **Facing Eviction?** Call 1-855-657-8387.
- **Facing Foreclosure?** Call 1-800-606-4819.
- **Seniors (age 60 and over)** with a legal issue outside of King County can also call CLEAR\*Sr at 1-888-387-7111.
- **Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers** can call any of these numbers using the relay service of your choice.

CLEAR and 2-1-1 will provide interpreters.

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