



GENERAL RELIEF

General Relief is an optional local program designed to address the financial needs of persons who do not meet the eligibility criteria for federal programs such as TANF and SSI.

Does General Relief exist in all counties or cities in Virginia?

No. Each county or city has the option of providing GR or not, and each one can set their own criteria. The program is developed by the local Department of Social Services (DSS) to meet the identified needs of each area. You will need to contact your local DSS office to determine if your area has a GR Plan and if you may qualify for assistance.

What types of assistance does the General Relief Program Offer?

General Relief offers two basic types of assistance:

- **GR – Maintenance** provides a monthly payment to individuals who are unemployed due to a disability lasting 30 days or more, or awaiting an SSI disability decision. Maintenance components may include:
 - Assistance for unemployed employable individuals;
 - Assistance for unemployable individuals;
 - Institutional care;

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- Ongoing medical assistance;
 - Interim assistance for those with a pending SSI application; and,
 - Assistance for unattached children.
- **GR – Emergency** provides help on a one-time only basis to those who need assistance and are unable to obtain it through other resources. This can include rent due, utilities due, emergency shelter, or medical needs. An eviction notice is not required for an emergency to exist. The need for assistance must also be the result of a change in circumstances over which you had no control, such as:
 - Loss of a job;
 - End of unemployment benefits;
 - Temporary illness;
 - Fire; or,
 - Other disaster.

If the amount of emergency assistance that can be paid by the local agency, along with other resources, will not prevent an immediate eviction or utility cut-off, then assistance from GR funds will not be given for that particular need. Emergency assistance may include:

- Food credit authorization assistance;
- Shelter assistance;
- Assistance to SSI recipients;
- Emergency medical assistance;
- Transient assistance;
- Assistance with burial costs;
- Clothing assistance; and,
- Relocation assistance.

Who is eligible for General Relief?

Generally a person is eligible if they are:

- Unemployed or Unemployable;
- Ineligible for assistance in a federal benefit program;
- United States citizens or qualified aliens;
- Residing in a qualified institution; and,
- Residing in the locality where they are requesting or receiving assistance;
 - You may also need to participate in the FSET (Food Stamp Employment and Training) program.

How do I apply for General Relief?

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Families wishing to apply for GR can do so by contacting their local DSS and completing an application. A face to face interview is required prior to approval of the application. A separate interview for GR benefits may be waived if you are applying for, or currently receiving, Food Stamps.

How long does it take for DSS to process my application?

Unless the agency is unable to take action through no fault of its own, the time standard for taking action to grant or deny GR maintenance assistance is 45 days following the date of application. If all eligibility requirements are met, action shall not be delayed until the 45-day limit. If the agency requires additional information from you, then the application will be continued an additional 15 days. An application may be disposed of if the agency is unable to locate you after making reasonable efforts.

How long will my General Relief benefits last?

All ongoing General Relief cases must be reviewed periodically to determine whether eligibility still exists. At that time a new form must be completed and all requirements that can change must be reverified. The time frames depend on the type of assistance being given:

- Assistance for Unemployed Employable Individuals – every three (3) months.
- Assistance for Unemployed Individuals – every twelve (12) months.
- Institutional Care – every twelve months.
- Ongoing Medical Assistance – every twelve (12) months.
- Interim Assistance – every twelve months.
- Assistance for Unattached Children – every six (6) months.

If the review reveals a change that will affect your benefits, you must be sent a Notice of Proposed Action before your benefits can be changed, terminated or suspended.

Can I transfer my GR Case to another city/county if I move out of my present locality?

Because of the nature of the General Relief Program, a General Relief case cannot be transferred from one locality to another. When you leave the locality, your case is to be terminated at the earliest date administratively possible. You must be advised that you may be eligible in the locality to which you are moving, if you apply in that new locality and if there is a GR program there.

Can I appeal if I am denied GR?

The Benefits and Services Section of DSS hears appeals pertaining to general relief, auxiliary grants, refugee programs, energy assistance, child day care, foster care, adoption

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and home based services. If you disagree with any decision or action your local DSS has taken concerning your request for assistance, you have the right to appeal.

What are my appeal options?

One way to appeal is to request a conference. Your appeal request must be in writing and submitted within 30 days of receiving the Notice of Proposed Action. You may write a letter or use a special form for appeal requests entitled "Appeal to State Department of Social Services", which is available at your local DSS. Requests for hearings should be sent to:

Hearing and Legal Services Manager
Virginia Department of Social Services
7 N. Eighth Street
Richmond, VA 23219

If you request a conference within 10 days of an advance notice to reduce or terminate your benefits or services, in most cases no action will be taken until after your conference. At this conference, the local agency must give you a complete explanation of its decision or action. You must also be given an opportunity to present your side and to tell why you disagree. You may bring anyone you wish to this conference to help you present your side such as a friend, a relative, or a lawyer. The agency will listen to what you have to say and then make its decision.

If you are not satisfied with the decision the agency makes at the conference, you can request a fair hearing. If you request a hearing within two days of your conference, no action will be taken until after your hearing.

How do I request a Hearing?

Another appeal option is to request a hearing, within 30 days from the date of the Notice of Proposed Action, without first requesting a conference. If you request a hearing within 10 days of an advance notice to reduce or terminate your benefits or services, in most cases no action will be taken until after the hearing officer makes a decision. Your appeal request must be in writing. You may write a letter or use a special form for appeal requests entitled "Appeal to State Department of Social Services", which is available at your local DSS. Requests for hearings should be sent to:

Hearing and Legal Services Manager
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What happens at the Hearing?

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At the hearing, you will be given an opportunity to present your side to a hearing officer from the Virginia Department of Social Services. Your hearing may be by telephone or face-to-face. You may bring anyone you wish to the hearing to help you present your side. The hearing officer will then issue a written decision within 60 days of the date you requested a hearing. If the hearing officer rules against your appeal, you must pay back all assistance you received during the appeal process.

If you have concerns about the way your hearing was conducted, or the decision of the hearing officer, you may request a panel review of the decision. The administrative panel does not have the authority to change the hearing officer's decision, but will review your concern(s) and respond to you within 60 days of your request. Your request must be made in writing within 10 days of receiving the hearing officer's decision to:

Administrative Review Panel
Appeals and Fair Hearings Bureau
7 N. Eighth Street
Richmond, VA 23219

You also have the right to judicial review of decisions rendered on GR appeals. The hearing decision will include information on filing for a judicial review.

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Free Legal information by Web and Phone: www.vlas.org and
1-866-LegalAid (534-5243)

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