



## SSI & Youth “Aging Out” of Foster Care:

*WIC 13757 (Assembly Bill 1331) Requires Counties to Screen Youth & Apply for SSI*

*Frequently Asked Question about Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 13757*

### ***What is Supplemental Security Income?***

SSI is a federal benefit that provides a monthly income to individuals with physical or mental disabilities and entitles them to additional supportive services. In addition, individuals who are eligible for SSI benefits also receive Medi-Cal, which provides health coverage.

### ***What is the aim of WIC 13757?***

In January 2008, WIC 13757 was enacted as a safety net for severely physically and mentally disabled foster youth who are exiting the state's foster care system. The law is designed to ensure that these youth who are potentially eligible for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits have applications submitted on their behalf well in advance of their exit from foster care so that, with SSI in place, they can make a safe and supported transition.

### ***Who will benefit from WIC 13757, enacted by the California legislature in 2008?***

Foster youth with serious mental or physical disabilities who are transitioning out of foster care will benefit from the legislation. The goal of the law is to ensure that these youth make a safe and supported transition from foster care by ensuring that federal SSI benefits are in place prior to their emancipation from foster care, providing the youth with a source of income and other supports to aid in their transition.

### ***What does WIC 13757 require of counties?***

- Screen all youth who are in foster care and are between the ages of 16.5 and 17.5 years of age for a physical or mental disability using an “SSI Disability Screening Guide.”
- Submit an SSI application on behalf of those youth who are determined likely eligible for benefits.

### ***Beyond making an application for SSI benefits on behalf of youth likely eligible, are there any requirements that will assist youth in maintaining their SSI eligibility as they transition out of foster care?***

In 2005, California passed legislation, WIC 137573 (AB 1633), that requires counties to take certain actions on behalf of foster youth who are receiving SSI prior to their emancipation out of foster care with the goal of ensuring that these youth maintain their eligibility for SSI benefits and that they understand what SSI benefits are for, why SSI is important, and what they must do to keep their SSI benefits.

Specifically, counties are required to:

- Provide information to the youth regarding the federal requirement that the youth establish continuing disability as an adult;
- Provide information to the youth regarding the process for becoming his or her own payee, or designating an appropriate representative payee;
- Assist the youth, as appropriate, in both of the above requirements.

See All County Letter 07-09, available at: <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/getinfo/ac107/pdf/07-09.pdf>



***Is there any guidance available to counties to aid them in understanding SSI and the application process?***

In February 2007, the California Department of Social Services released Best Practice Guidelines for use by counties which provide a viable process to identify disabled youth and establish their eligibility for SSI. The Best Practices Guidelines were created by a statewide workgroup consisting of county social and eligibility workers, county program managers, representatives of the County Welfare Directors' Association (CWDA), child advocates, current and former foster youth, and State staff. They are available at: <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/getinfo/acl07/pdf/07-10.pdf>.

***Why was WIC 13757 necessary?***

- Each year in California, over 4,000 youth “age out” of the foster care system when they turn 18 and are no longer eligible for foster care. According to studies of California’s former foster youth, 65% emancipate without a place to live, less than 3% go to college and 51% are unemployed.
- Particularly vulnerable are the estimated 15% of foster youth with a serious physical or mental disability. These young people exit foster care with the same housing, employment and educational challenges as all youth in foster care and must also contend with the challenges of a managing a mental or physical disability with virtually no assistance.
- Despite their potential eligibility for federally-funded Supplemental Security Income (SSI), most youth with a disability do not have this vital economic assistance in place upon emancipation because, until now, there has been now one to assist youth with the applications and there has been a lack of consistent protocols for screening youth and submitting applications.
- Youth with disabilities who exit foster care without SSI in place are denied the many advantages that it provides recipients, such as a monthly income, access to subsidized housing, vocational training and expanded access to health services.

***For more information on SSI and Transitioning Youth:***

[www.ssitransitions.org](http://www.ssitransitions.org)

*For more information contact*

*Laura Streimer, Legal Director, The Alliance for Children’s Rights at (213) 368-6010*

*Anjuli Arora Dow, Attorney, The Alliance for Children’s Rights at (213) 368-6010*

*The Alliance for Children’s Rights*

*3333 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 550*

*Los Angeles, CA 90010*

[www.kids-alliance.org](http://www.kids-alliance.org)