



Washington Public Assistance for Public Interest Parolees

This brochure will tell you what benefits you may be eligible for if you are a public interest parolee (paroled for a period of at least one year). If you have a different immigration status please read one of the brochures listed below.

- **Washington Public Assistance for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Family Visa Beneficiaries**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Legal Residents (Permanently Residing Under Color of Law)**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Undocumented Immigrants**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Immigrants Who Legalized under the Immigration Reform and Control Act**

How can I tell if I am a public interest parolee?

A public interest parolee is someone who is paroled into the U.S. either indefinitely or for a specific time period (if your time period is less than one year, read the brochure for Legal Residents listed above for information about your benefits). Many parolees are eligible to adjust to lawful permanent residence after one year in the U.S. Your immigration documents should list your status either by name or with a code. If you don't have a document that shows your status, consult an immigration lawyer or call Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (206/587-4009 or 509-854-2100) for advice. You may also be able to get assistance from DSHS to help you obtain copies of immigration documents you have lost.

I am a public interest parolee. What benefits can I receive?

If you came to the United States before August 22, 1996, you may be eligible for:

- Cash benefits (Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, General Assistance Unemployable—state program for those who are disabled or 65 and over, or SSI—federal program for those who are disabled or 65 and over)
- Medical benefits (Federal Medicaid, including emergency, prenatal and children's health programs or the State Basic Health Plan and Hospital Charity Care)
- Food Stamps, social services and other federal programs.

To qualify, you must be low income, have few resources and meet other program requirements.

What if I came to the United States on or after August 22, 1996?

For the first five years in the US, you may be eligible for the following **federal** programs:

- Emergency Medicaid, immunizations, testing and treatment of communicable diseases
- Disaster relief
- School lunch, child nutrition programs, foster care and adoption assistance
- Higher education loans, Head Start and other education programs, Job Training Partnership Act, community programs necessary to protect life or safety such as domestic violence shelters, and the Consolidated Emergency Assistance Program.
 - You will **not** be eligible for other **federal** programs (cash benefits from TANF , Food Stamps, non-emergency Medicaid) for the first five years you are here (unless you, your spouse or your parent (or children) are in the U.S. armed services)).

In addition, you may be eligible for these **state** programs:

- Medical benefits for pregnant women as well as health care programs for emergency costs. The state health care programs for children and families receiving cash assistance were terminated on October 1, 2002. For more information see the pamphlet called Washington State Immigrant Health Care Transition: October 2002. You may also be eligible for the Basic Health Plan and Hospital Charity Care.

What should I do if I need welfare benefits and I don't speak English?

The welfare office is required to provide you with a free interpreter without delay. Be sure to mark on the application form if you have difficulty in reading, speaking or understanding English. The office should also send you translated notices about your benefits so that you can read about your rights and responsibilities in your own language. Keep a copy of the letters the welfare office sends you. When you take information to the office, ask them to make a copy for you to keep and stamp the date on both copies. If you have not received 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.

Am I eligible for the special programs for refugees?

No. The Refugee Assistance program, which provides cash assistance and medical coupons to eligible refugees and asylees, and persons "paroled as refugees," is **not** available to public interest parolees.

If I came as a public interest parolee, am I eligible for SSI?

If you came to the United States before August 22, 1996, you may be eligible for SSI if you are disabled and were in lawful status on August 22, 1996. If you are not disabled but are over age 65, you may receive SSI if you have a 10 year work history in the U.S. (including work quarters earned by a spouse). Military personnel and their families may also receive SSI.

If you came to the United States on or after August 22, 1996, you will probably need to become a citizen to be eligible for SSI. You may be eligible 5 years after you arrive if you can show that you have a 10 year work history (including your spouse's work). Some exceptions apply for military personnel and their families. This is a complicated area so it is best to consult a legal services lawyer for more information.

Can receiving cash assistance prevent me from getting a green card (lawful permanent residence) or becoming a citizen?

No. Public interest parolees may receive cash benefits and still be eligible to get a green card or their citizenship, with two exceptions. First, immigrants who **fraudulently** receive public assistance may have trouble becoming citizens and may even face deportation if convicted of a crime. Second, immigrants who have green cards, spend more than six months outside the U.S. and are dependent on **cash** assistance for support may also have trouble reentering the country. Receiving non-cash benefits like medical coupons or food stamps – except for medical benefits for persons institutionalized for long term care – is not a problem. Consult an immigration attorney for questions or read our brochure *New INS Guidance on "Public Charge": When is it Safe to Use Public Benefits?* for more information.

Can I be denied assistance because I have a sponsor?

Probably not, because public interest parolees who have a sponsor are not subject to the rules on sponsor deeming even though you must report any actual income your sponsoring organization has given you. For Washington state programs, the sponsor deeming rules only apply to immigrants who have immigrated to the United States with an affidavit of support (Form I-864) filled out on their behalf. Public interest parolees who have an affidavit of support have a different form (Form I-134).

What if the welfare office denies my application?

If the welfare office denies your application or terminates your benefits it may be because you are no longer eligible. It may also be because the rules are complicated and the welfare office has made a mistake. If you believe you are eligible or would like another person to review your case, you should either tell your worker that you want a Fair Hearing or ask for a copy of the Hearing Request form to fill out. There is no fee or penalty for requesting a fair hearing and you can always withdraw your request later if you believe the welfare office was correct. You should also contact a legal services office for advice.

7930EN

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice. This information is current as of the date of its printing, June 2003.

© 2003 Northwest Justice Project — 1-888-201-1014, TTY 1-888-201-9737

(Permission for copying and distribution granted to Washington State Access to Justice Network and to individuals for non-commercial purposes only.)