

TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

#13

6/06

ARE YOU LEAVING MONEY ON THE TABLE?

It is not easy to balance a household budget when you have a low income. But you can supplement your income by claiming all the benefits and supports you have the right to claim. Here is a checklist. It includes many of the major programs that help Maine people supplement their incomes. Make sure you are not leaving money on the table!!

Earned Income Tax Credit (EIC)

If you have earned income and are raising children, you can file for this significant tax credit. **For tax year 2005, this credit was worth up to \$4,400.** This is a “refundable credit”. This means that even if you owe a small amount of taxes, you get the full amount of your credit. The IRS will pay you the difference. Money in your pocket! You don’t have to wait until tax time. You can get this credit through the year, using the “advance credit” option. Other child related tax credits you may be eligible for: Child Tax Credit and Child and Dependent Care Credit.

Maine Tax and Rent Refund Program

This Maine program pays a cash rebate to homeowners and renters whose tax payments or rent payments are high in relation to their income. In 2005 the maximum benefit of this program was \$2,000.00 per year. Also, the program was expanded to include more middle income tax payers. If your property tax is more than 4% of your income, or 20% of your rent is more than 4% of your income, you are probably eligible. Apply online at www.state.me.us/revenue, or order a paper application form by calling 624-7894. Towns and area Pine Tree Legal offices also have forms.

Maine Homestead Exemption

This is a small property tax credit for all Maine homeowners. Apply at your town office. Once you have applied, you will be eligible for following years, unless you move. Then you would need to re-apply.

Poverty Tax Abatements

If you have low-income, limited resources, and cannot afford to pay the taxes on your home, you can apply to the town for a “poverty tax abatement”. You can apply for up to 3 years of back taxes owed. Apply at your town office.

Family Emergency Assistance

One time per year, households with children can get help with an emergency problem such as a threatened eviction or an electric shut off. Apply at your local DHHS office.

Social Security Disability and SSI

If you are disabled, and expect to continue to be disabled for a year or more, you may apply for disability benefits. Social Security Disability (SSD) is for people with a recent earnings record. Children’s benefits are available if parents worked and then became disabled. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is for disabled and elderly people who do not have past earnings, or to supplement disability benefits for people with a smaller earning record. SSI is also available to

children who have marked impairments and whose family is income eligible. Apply at your nearest Social Security Office.

MaineCare

People can get this free or low-cost coverage. Adults may be eligible for MaineCare even if they earn too much for other low-income programs. For example, if you have children, you can earn up to 200% of the federal poverty level (\$40,000.00 for a family of 4 in 2006) and still get MaineCare. There is not an asset test for children. Children who are living with relative caregivers qualify on their own income unless they've been adopted. Contact your local DHHS office.

Food Stamps

As with MaineCare, your household may be eligible even if you think your income is too high. You can calculate your eligibility level by using our "food stamp estimator" at www.ptla.org/estimator.htm. If you have related children in your home, you do not have to meet an asset test. For others, you must have limited assets. But many types of property, like your home and car are not counted.

Medicare Supplements

As a Medicare recipient, are you getting all of the benefits you could be getting? Medicare prescription drug coverage is available to everyone with Medicare, regardless of income, health status or how you pay for prescription drugs today. For example, MaineCare will pay the premium for your Part B supplement plan if you are financially eligible. There are other supplements you may be missing out on. To find out, go to www.Medicare.gov or call Legal Services for the Elderly: 1-800-750-5353 or call your local agency on aging office.

Fuel Assistance (LIHEAP)

Low-income households can qualify each heating season for help with their fuel bills. Apply at your county CAP (Community Action Program).

Child Only TANF (granny grant)

Relative caregivers can apply for a child only TANF grant, which is based only on the child's income. The benefit for one child is \$138 a month and for any additional children it is pro-rated. Proof of your relationship to the child is required but guardianship is not necessary to apply or receive this grant. Contact your local DHHS office.

Source: Provided by Pine Tree Legal Assistance and Volunteer Lawyers Project. For additional information, contact Families And Children Together at #1-866-298-0896. Pine Tree Legal Assistance (check your phone book for local offices) or Volunteer Lawyers Project at #1-800-442-4293.



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