

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

## *Recently Passed Legislation Requires Counties to Screen Youth & Apply for SSI*

### ***What policy change recently happened?***

Recently passed state legislation will create a safety net for severely physically and mentally disabled foster youth who are exiting the state’s foster care system. The new law, AB 1331, is designed to ensure that foster youth with serious mental or physical disabilities 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. SSI is a federal program, that provides a monthly cash benefit to the nation’s most vulnerable: disabled children and adults with limited or no income.

### ***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.

### ***Who will benefit from AB 1331, recently passed by the California legislature?***

On October 11, 2007 Governor Schwarzenegger signed Assembly Bill 1331. The goal of the bill is to ensure that all California youth in foster care with a serious mental or physical disability make a safe, supported transition from foster care by having access to federal SSI benefits prior to their emancipation from foster care.

### ***What does AB 1331 require of counties?***

AB 1331 requires all California counties to:

- 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.
- Submit an SSI application on behalf of those youth who are determined likely eligible for benefits.

### ***When will AB 1331 take effect?***

AB 1331 takes effect January 1, 2008.

### ***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 and represent. They are available at: <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/getinfo/acl07/pdf/07-10.pdf>.

### ***Why was AB 1331 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.

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