

<p>Social Services Block Grant</p> <p>Dear Colleague Letter</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Community Services Division of Social Services 330 C Street, SW, 5th Floor Mail Room 5425 Washington, DC 20201 http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/programs/ssbg</p>
<p>Re: National Emergency Preparedness Month</p>	<p>Date: September 14, 2017</p>

Dear Colleagues:

In recognition of September as National Emergency Preparedness Month, this Dear Colleague Letter is to provide information about the use of Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funding to support communities in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.

States and Territories have an important role in supporting vulnerable children, adults, and families through a wide variety of social services programming, offering them safeguard in their times of greatest need. This document is provided as a resource to states to consider the uses and limitations of SSBG in emergency preparedness and recovery.

Opportunities for Prevention and Action

SSBG funds enable each state to furnish social services best suited to meet the needs of the individuals residing within the state. In planning or responding to an emergency, states must direct services to one or more of the five social services goals, set in the law:

- Achieving or maintaining economic self-support to prevent, reduce or eliminate dependency or institutionalization;
- Achieving or maintaining self-sufficiency, including reduction or prevention of dependency;
- Preventing or remedying neglect, abuse, exploitation of children and adults unable to protect their own interests, or preserving, rehabilitating or reuniting families;
- Preventing or reducing inappropriate institutional care by providing for community- based care, home care, or other forms of less intensive care; and
- Securing referral or admission for institutional care when other forms of care are not appropriate or providing services to individuals not in institutions.

Services may include, but are not limited to, day care for children or adults; protective services for children or adults; special services to persons with disabilities; case management; health-related services; transportation; foster care for children or adults; substance abuse; housing; home-delivered meals; independent/transitional living; employment services or any other social services found necessary by the state for its population.

The grant may be used by states to provide services to individuals newly qualified, reconnect existing beneficiaries and extend assistance to displaced individuals.

Limitations of the Use of Funds

SSBG funds are subject to statutory limitations set forth in Section 2005 of the Social Security Act [42 U.S.C. 1397d]. States may not use SSBG funds for the purchase or improvement of land, or the purchase, construction, or permanent improvement of any building or other facility, except by waiver of the Secretary of Health and Human Services or congressional action. Funds also may not be used for medical care (other than family planning services, rehabilitation services, or initial detoxification of an alcoholic or drug dependent individual) unless it is an integral but subordinate part of an allowable social service.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: *What flexibilities are available?*

Answer: States have the ability to apportion SSBG funds to address social service needs within the State, so long as those needs meet the five broad goals in the law. In the regular block grant administration, states submit a preliminary plan detailing how states are using the funds among some 29 social services. This plan is accepted by federal officials before funds are released each fiscal year. States may decide to reallocate funds from their previously-submitted plan to services and activities that best respond to given needs to assist populations in disaster recovery. States seeking to amend an existing year expenditure plan to respond to a disaster should submit a new plan that details the adjustments to the federal Office of Community Services (OCS).

In addition, Congress has in the past made available additional one-time funds, called a supplemental, to address emergency/disaster situations through the Social Services Block Grant. Such supplemental funding is available only if awarded by law. If funds are made available in a supplemental, OCS will work with states to plan and expend funds.

Question: *What waivers are available?*

Answer: In extraordinary circumstances, the Secretary of HHS has authority to waive the limitation in Section 2005 of the law that governs the SSBG, the Social Security Act, on purchase or improvement of land and the purchase, construction, or permanent improvement of a building. In addition, the Secretary may also waive the limitation on the provision of medical care.

Question: *How are the waivers activated?*

Answer: The responsible state SSBG official must submit a waiver request addressed to the Secretary of Health and Human Services with attention to the Director of the Office of Community Services describing the extraordinary circumstances that justify the waiver and explaining how the waiver will contribute to the state's ability to meet and carry out the purposes of the SSBG program in the disaster circumstances.

Federal partners are available to state SSBG officials for consultation and development of an SSBG emergency preparedness contingency plan. In addition to federal official expertise, federal staff also can provide linkages to other states with experience coordinating activities and flexible application of SSBG services and activities in the aftermath of a disaster, or in planning proactively in the case of an emergency. For consultations, state officials should contact their SSBG Program Specialist, found here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/resource/ssbg-staff-assignments-by-region>.

Additional Resources:

Emergency preparedness brochure from the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)
<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/90058>

Emergency Supplies Checklist
<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/90354>

For more information about the use of SSBG funds to support delivery of social services to those preparing for or impacted by emergencies, you also may contact Dr. Yolanda Butler, Director of the Division of Social Services at Yolanda.Butler@acf.hhs.gov or by phone at (202) 401-5591.

Sincerely,

/s/

J. Janelle George
Acting Director
Office of Community Services
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

/s/

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