

## For More Information Or Assistance Call The Legal Aid Office In Your Community:

O`AHU: 536-4302  
BIG ISLAND:  
Hilo 924-0678  
Kona 329-8331  
MAUI: 242-0724  
KAUA`I: 245-7580  
LANA`I: 565-6089  
MOLOKA`I: 553-3251

Visit us on the web at [www.legalaidhawaii.org](http://www.legalaidhawaii.org)

**REMEMBER:** This pamphlet is meant to give you general information and not to give you specific legal advice about your case. The law often changes. Each case is different.

### The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii

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Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

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# LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF HAWAII

*Helping the people of Hawaii since 1950*

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



## How To Prepare For The Reduction In General Assistance (GA) Benefits

### GENERAL ASSISTANCE ("GA") BENEFITS WILL BE CUT TO \$300.00 PER MONTH EFFECTIVE NOV 1st 2009

Effective November 1, 2009, the State of Hawaii's Department of Human Services will be decreasing the General Assistance (GA) benefits from \$450 to \$300 per month effective November 1, 2009. The GA benefit amount may increase again the future, depending on state funding.

If you are currently a recipient of GA benefits you should have received a notice or will be receiving a notice from DHS soon. **It is important that you save the notice and the envelope it arrived in.** This is a statewide reduction for all GA recipients and so long as DHS provides 10 days notice can not be challenged by Legal Aid at this time.

An expected increase in your Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP" formerly "Food Stamps") may help to off-set the reduced payment. Please check your SNAP notices to be sure they are using your new, lower payment amount to calculate your SNAP benefits.



# How To Prepare For The Reduction In General Assistance (GA) Benefits

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Apply for other benefits
2. Take action to preserve your housing
3. Plan and spend wisely
4. Contact other organizations for help

### 1. CONSIDER OTHER BENEFIT PROGRAMS:

~ Contact your DHS worker if you have been disabled for more than 12 months or longer to find out if you qualify for Aid to Aged, Blind, and Disabled (“AABD”) benefits.

~ Find out if you are eligible for Social Security benefits by calling 1-800-772-1213 or contact Legal Aid to apply for assistance.

~ Contact Lawyers for Equal Justice (LEJ) at 808-587-7605 or VA Benefits at 1-800-827-1000 if you are a military veteran.

### 2. CONSIDER YOUR HOUSING OPTIONS:

#### A. PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS:

##### REPORT THE CHANGE TO PUBLIC HOUSING:

~ As a tenant of public housing, the amount you pay for rent depends on the amount of your income (which includes general assistance payment), so every time your income changes you must inform the Hawai‘i Public Housing Authority (HPHA) at your complex’s project management office. For most public housing tenants, rent is set at roughly 30% of their income.

~ When your GA benefits go down your rent should go down on the first of the month after you report the change.

~ You must report this change to HPHA within 10 days for any changes to be made. Report all changes in writing by providing a copy of your DHS notice and the attached form letter to the project office. Make sure that you keep a copy of all letters that you provide to the project office.

#### 2A Continued

~ If you report the change on time, but HPHA is not able to process the rent adjustment before the next month, you will still be entitled to a retroactive adjustment of the rent and you will receive credit for any overpayment you made.

~ If you do not report decreases in income promptly, you may end up paying more rent than you are supposed to pay. Even if you can prove that your income was reduced in the past, HPHA will not go back and make adjustments for past months if you did not report the decrease.

#### What To Do If Your Benefits Go Back Up

~ If your benefits go back up, you must report the change to HPHA within 10 days of the increase. Report all changes in writing by providing a copy of your DHS notice and the attached form letter to the project office. Make sure that you keep a copy of all letters that you provide to the project office.

~ You should plan for your rent to increase the month after your benefits go back up. However, HPHA must give you at least 30 days notice before the rent increase can go into effect.

~ If you do not report increases in income within 10 working days and HPHA later learns of the change, your rent can be increased back to the date you should have reported the change. If you can not pay the back rent, an eviction could result. Make sure to report all changes in income promptly to avoid any problems.

#### B. SECTION 8 HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS RECIPIENTS

##### REPORT THE CHANGE TO YOUR SECTION 8 WORKER:

~ Your rent will be decreased when your income is reduced IF you report the decrease in writing to project management. The rent reduction will take effect the month after you report a change.

~ You must report this change to your Section 8 worker within 10 days for any changes to be made. Report all changes in writing by providing a copy of the DHS notice and the attached form letter to your Section 8 provider. Make sure that you keep a copy of all letters that you provide.

#### 2B Continued

~ If you report late, your rent will not be decreased until later. To get the full rent reduction, report the decrease in March.

~ If you report the change on time, but HPHA is not able to process the rent adjustment before the next month, you will still be entitled to a retroactive adjustment of the rent and you will receive credit for any overpayment you made.

~ If you do not report decreases in income promptly, you may end up paying more rent than you are supposed to pay. Even if you can prove that your income was reduced in the past, Section 8 will not go back and make adjustments for past months if you did not report the decrease.

#### What To Do If Your Benefits Go Back Up

~ If your income goes up, you must report the change within 10 days of the increase.

~ Report all changes in writing by providing a copy of your DHS notice and the attached form letter to your Section 8 provider. Make sure that you keep a copy of all letters that you provide to the project office.

~ You should plan for your rent to increase the month after your benefits go back up. However, HPHA must give you at least 30 days notice before the rent increase can go into effect.

~ If you do not report increases in income within 10 working days and Section 8 later learns of the change, your rent can be increased back to the date you should have reported the change. If you can not pay the back rent, an eviction could result. Make sure to report all changes in income promptly to avoid any problems.

#### C. PRIVATE RENTAL TENANTS

If you live in a private rental and do not receive any rental assistance your rent will not change. If you can not pay your rent, you may want to consider moving if alternative and affordable housing is available. If you are on a month-to-month lease you must give your landlord at least 28 days written notice if you plan to move. If you have a longer lease, you may not be able to move early without a penalty. Check your lease and contact Legal Aid for more details. If you are not able to move but can’t pay your rent, you may consider applying for rental assistance (see referrals on the back of this brochure).

#### D. OTHER HOUSING (TRANSITIONAL SHELTER, REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS, CLEAN AND SOBER HOUSING)

Notify your program managers immediately once you receive notice of the GA benefit reduction. Depending on the type of shelter or transitional housing program your rent may be reduced if you provide your housing provider with written notice. Report all changes in writing by providing a copy of the DHS notice and the attached form letter to your housing provider. **Make sure that you keep a copy of all letters that you provide. WARNING:** Not all shelters and transitional housing programs calculate rent based on your income. In those cases your rent may not go down. Please check with your program managers.

### 3. PLAN AND SPEND WISELY:

- Cut back on spending for non-essentials: cigarettes, alcohol, pre-packaged foods, eating out, or more than one cell phone.
- Use food bank services to stock up on non-perishable foods.
- Shop at garage sales and thrift stores.
- Reduce electricity and water use.
- Cancel cable service and optional telephone services like caller-ID and call-waiting.
- Car pool or use public transportation if possible.
- Coordinate car trips.

### 4. CONTACT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS FOR HELP:

• Call “211” for referrals to social service organizations, food resources and rental assistance programs

• Refer to agency list on the last page of “Street Beat” a free newspaper for and by Hawai‘i’s people without housing

• If you have a social worker or adult mental health worker, talk to them about your needs

• Check Legal Aid’s website at [legallaidhawaii.org](http://legallaidhawaii.org) for other helpful brochures and referrals