

# Advocacy Code Card

## Health Insurance

**DC Medicaid** (202) 724-5506  
DC Medicaid is a healthcare program that pays for medical services for low-income and disabled DC residents.

**DC Healthy Families (SCHIP)** (202) 639-4030  
Free health insurance program, funded by the District of Columbia and federal governments for low-income families with children.

**The DC HealthCare Alliance (Alliance)** (202) 639-4030  
Free health insurance for needy District residents who are not eligible for federally financed Medicaid benefits. This includes non-disabled childless adults, immigrants, and individuals who are over-income for Medicaid.

### Additional Health Insurance Resources

Maryland Medicaid (MCHP) (800) 456-8900  
Virginia Medicaid (FAMIS Plus) (866) 873-2647

## Health Insurance Screening Questions

- Are you having problems getting services or prescriptions through your insurance company?
- Are you being billed for medical services?
- Have any services been terminated by your insurance company?

## Housing

### Tenant's Rights

No one has to live in unsafe, hazardous, or unsanitary conditions. Tenants have the right to request an inspection and if necessary proactively sue their landlord to enforce the D.C. housing code. It is a violation of local housing laws for landlords to ignore any problem that constitutes a fire hazard or a serious threat to the life, health, or safety of the tenant. These conditions include but are not limited to the following:

- Mice
- Rats
- Roaches
- Mold
- Lead
- Leaky pipes
- Lack of heat and hot water
- Electrical problems
- Inoperable smoke or carbon monoxide detectors

### Reasonable Accommodations

Landlords are required to make reasonable accommodations to an apartment or to the program rules in order to accommodate a household member's physical or mental disability. Accommodations or modifications that are considered reasonable and are required under the law include:

- Lower cabinets for someone in a wheelchair.
- Install grab bars in bathrooms.
- Install ramps when there are less than five steps.
- Install fire alarms that flash for people with hearing impairments.

### Housing Resources

DC Housing Authority (202) 535-1000  
Department of Consumer & Regulatory Affairs (for housing inspections) (202) 442-4400  
The Virginia Williams Resource Center (for emergency housing) (202) 724-3932  
Department of Housing and Urban Development—DC Field Office (202) 275-9200  
Department of Housing and Urban Development—Maryland Field Office (410) 962-2520  
Department of Housing and Urban Development—Virginia Field Office (800) 842-2610

## Housing Screening Questions

- Do you have a stable place to live?
- Do you have mold, mice, roaches, rats, or bed bugs in your home?
- Have you or your child ever been tested for lead?
- Do you have smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, and window guards?

## Special Education

**Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** Every student with a disability is entitled to receive a FAPE in the least restrictive environment that can meet the child's unique needs.

**FAPE includes:** Any services that a child requires in order to learn such as: specialized instruction, speech, occupational or physical therapy, or psychological counseling.

**Child Find:** State-mandated plan to ensure that all children, ages 3-22, who need special education and related services are identified and evaluated.

**Individualized Education Plan (IEP):** A document that describes the special education and related services a child who qualifies for services is to receive.

**504 Plan Accommodations:** Some children with disabilities may not qualify for an IEP, but may qualify for accommodations under a 504 plan.

### Obtaining Special Education Services

1. **Request for Special Education Evaluation:** Anyone, including a doctor, can make a request, which must be in writing. Parental consent is required before the school may evaluate the child. The school must assess in all areas of suspected disability.
2. **Evaluation Timeframe:** DC schools have 120 days from the date the referral is received to complete the assessment and determine if the child has a disability that affects his or her learning. The evaluation tests are free.
3. **IEP Development:** If at a meeting of all relevant school staff and the parent, it is determined that the child has a disability that affects his or her classroom experience, an IEP must be developed by the MDT/IEP team within 30 days.
4. **Placement:** The child should receive special education services with typically developing peers as much as possible, unless the child's needs require a different setting.

### Children Birth to Age 3

Children birth to age 3 who have developmental delays also have a right to be provided early intervention services that include having service providers come to the child's home or day care setting.

### School Discipline Concerns

Students with special needs cannot be suspended for more than 10 days in a school year if the behaviors are a manifestation of the child's disability. Regardless, a school must provide services to special needs students during a suspension.

Regular education students have protections for suspensions and expulsions as well—including the right to written notice of the suspension and the right to challenge it legally.

### Visiting Instruction Services

All students unable to attend school due to a disability or health impairment have the right to receive education services at home or in the hospital.

### Special Education Resources

DCPS Office of Special Education (202) 442-4800  
DC Early Intervention Program/Strong Start (children ages 0-3) (202) 727-3665  
DC Early Stages Program (children ages 3-5) (202) 698-8037  
MD Division of Special Education/Early Intervention (410) 767-0261  
VA Department of Education Division of Special Education (804) 225-3252  
DC Public Schools Visiting Instruction Services (202) 673-8932

## Special Education Screening Questions

- Is your child failing any of his or her classes?
- Is your child performing below grade level?
- Has your child been required to repeat any grades?
- Is your child having behavioral problems at school?
- Has your child been evaluated for special education services?

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## Supplemental Security Income

### Understanding SSI for Children

**Social Security Administration:** (800) 772-1213

- Child must be younger than 19 and regularly attending school. After age 19, adult criteria apply.
- Child cannot be married or head of household.
- Child must have a physical or mental condition that can be supported by medical evidence; and
- Condition must result in marked or severe functional limitations; and
- Condition must have lasted or be expected to last at least 12 months or end in death.
- Income eligibility requirement applies.

### Presumed Disabilities

SSA begins paying SSI immediately for the following conditions and for a period of up to 6 months while the final determination is made:

- HIV Infection
- Birth weight less than 1200 grams
- Blindness
- Severe mental deficiency in a child at least 7 years old
- Deafness
- Total bed confinement due to a longstanding commitment
- Down Syndrome
- A stroke with continued marked difficulty
- Cerebral Palsy
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Amputation of leg at hip

### SSI Screening Questions

- Does your child have a physical, mental or learning disability?
- Do you receive SSI for your child?
- Have you applied for SSI benefits for your child?
- What is the status of your application: granted, pending, or denied?
- If the application has been denied, have you filed an appeal?

## Public Benefits

### Types of Public Benefits

To receive public benefits, one must meet income eligibility. Clients must contact their local Department of Human Services Economic Security Administration Office (ESA) to apply for these programs. Examples of common public benefit programs in DC:

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** Provides cash assistance to low income families with children.
- **Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP):** Provides vouchers to buy food.
- **Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC):** Provides nutritional counseling and vouchers to supplement the diets of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5.

### Utility Assistance Resources

DC, MD, and VA offer a variety of utility assistance programs for poor and low-income families. These programs provide financial assistance with heating and cooling bills as well as discounts on gas, electric and telephone bills.

DC Department of the Environment Energy Assistance Line	(202) 673-6750
MD Energy Assistance (help with home heating bills)	(800) 352-1446
MD Fuel Fund (help with paying energy bills)	(410) 235-9080
VA Low-Income Home Energy Assistance	(800) 230-6977

### Public Benefits Screening Questions

- Are you working?
- Do you have enough food?
- Do you have enough money to pay your bills?
- Are you receiving income assistance? If not, have you applied for income assistance?
- What is the status of your application: granted, pending, or denied?
- If the application has been denied, have you filed an appeal?

## Mental Health Services

Mental health services are available to low income children and adolescents in the District. Families can contact the DC Department of Health's Access Helpline for assistance in locating a mental health provider. The helpline can also activate emergency mobile crisis teams to respond to children and adults in crisis.

**Access Helpline, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week** **888-793-4357**

Children receiving their health insurance through Medicaid are entitled to receive medically necessary mental health services at no cost. These may include:

- Psychiatric medication management
- Wraparound services
- Individual and/or family therapy
- Community support workers
- Community-based intervention workers
- Multi-systemic therapy
- Substance abuse treatment and counseling
- Inpatient psychiatric hospitalization
- Placement at a psychiatric residential treatment facility

### Additional Mental Health Resources

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (877)463-3464  
Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (804) 786-3921

### Mental Health Screening Questions

- Have you been able to secure therapy for your child?
- Have you had any problems filling your prescriptions?
- Has your child's behavior been getting worse?

## How You Can Be An Advocate

- Take a few minutes to learn more about the family's living situation.
- Ask about housing, school, food, guardianship, and benefits.
- Ask whether the family has any legal problems that they would like to discuss with a free attorney.
- Document the patient's need.
- Educate families about their rights for services and benefits.
- Encourage families to apply and reapply for benefits or services in order to maximize their household income.
- Telephone or write a letter to a landlord, attorney, or caseworker on behalf of the family or child.
- Get involved in the legislative process.

If you believe the child or family requires legal assistance please contact:

**Children's Law Center**  
**(202) 467-4900, option 3**  
**www.childrenslawcenter.org**

## Other Resources

### Hotlines

National Domestic Violence Hotline (800) 799-7233  
National Suicide and Crisis Hotline (800) 784-2433

### In Maryland

Maryland Office of the Public Defender (877) 430-5187  
Maryland Legal Aid Bureau (800) 999-8904  
Maryland Disability Law Center (410) 727-6352  
Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (800) 510-0050

### In Virginia

Virginia Indigent Defense Commission (804) 662-7249  
Legal Services of Northern Virginia (866) 534-5243