

Cuts being made to Disability Lifeline benefits

Participants may appeal termination of benefits by contacting DSHS

LISA WOOD

University House Resident

If you are receiving Disability Lifeline (formerly GAU) benefits, your time may be running out for receiving funds.

State budget cuts this year led to changes in the way Disability Lifeline benefits are distributed. A person on Disability Lifeline may receive the \$339/month benefits for 24 months in a 60-month period. Those in the program who have exceeded the 24-month limit are being notified that their benefits have expired. The first round of notices were sent out in August, with an effective date of Sept. 1.

“That is what is happening to an estimated 1,700 people statewide and 617 of those are estimated to be King County residents alone for the month of August,” according to Rebecca Henrie, Communications Chief at the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

The cuts could ultimately affect hundreds of Seattle Housing Authority residents and Housing Choice Voucher holders. According to statistics provided by Seattle Housing Authority, 246 households in its public housing program (excluding HOPE VI communities) and 497 households in its Housing Choice Voucher program receive 10 percent or more of their income through Disability Lifeline as of Dec. 31, 2009. Between the two programs, a total of 743 households

Please see “Benefits” on Page 5

Benefits

Continued from front page

altogether are receiving Disability Lifeline assistance.

Of those, 562 households derive all of their income from Disability Lifeline payments, and would potentially be without any income upon expiration of their benefits.

The housing authority advises affected residents to contact their property manager or community builder for a referral to service providers who may offer emergency assistance.

“If a person receiving housing assistance loses their assistance and this causes their income to go down, they can have their rent adjusted,” notes Seattle Housing Authority Communications Director Virginia Felton. “To get this process started, they can ask their property manager or Section 8 case manager for a special review.”

The appeals process

Disability Lifeline recipients may appeal the termination with DSHS. In order for an appeal to succeed, Washington Law Help recommends that the appellant be able to provide proof that he or she qualifies as disabled under SSI disability standards.

There are a number of steps you should take to prepare your appeal.

If you receive a termination letter from DSHS, you have 90 days to file an appeal. However, to continue receiving benefits without interruption, you must file your appeal by the end of the last weekday of the month in which you received your letter.

To receive the appeal form go online to www.washingtonlawhelp.org and click the link “GA-U being replaced by Disability Lifeline” in the column on the right. Read

the instructions included on the link.

You can pick up the form at your local DSHS office. When you file your appeal (or as soon as you can), request a copy of your records from DSHS to present at your appeal hearing.

It is recommended that you start the appeal process first and then seek legal help. After you start the process, call 877-211-9274 or dial 2-1-1 to be connected with legal assistance.

“The best way to file an appeal is to go to your local DSHS office,” said Mike Buchman of Solid Ground. “Turn in a written hearing request. Keep a copy! Have DSHS stamp your copy with the date received. Keep this as your proof of submitting your appeal.”

Buchman also suggests that if you can’t go down to the office, call and speak to a person directly — not a voicemail. Take notes of your conversation and keep those notes as proof for your appeal.

When you go to your appeal hearing, bring a copy of your DSHS records, as well as medical records and other evidence that proves you qualify as disabled under SSI disability standards. To read about the process in detail, visit the web address listed above.

Those who appeal the termination of benefits will assume some risk if their appeal is unsuccessful. “No matter how long the termination hearing lasts, if you lose the appeal, you will be expected to pay back up to two months worth of benefits,” Buchman said.

For more information, contact Solid Ground’s Family Assistance Attorney’s at 206-694-6742 or email at evonvez@solid-ground.org.