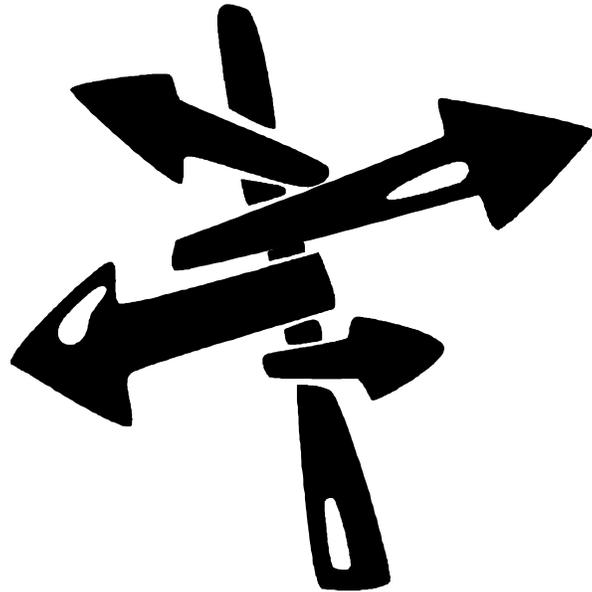


FINDING YOUR WAY IN KENT COUNTY



What to do before you are released

Where to go for help after you are released

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Reentry Law Project
Legal Aid of Western Michigan

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PART I: IMPORTANT PAPERS AND RECORDS

PAPERS YOU WILL NEED

You'll need certain papers to get a job, get help from social services, and to find a place to live. This section lists some of the papers you'll need. You should get as many of these papers as possible before you're released. If you do not have a driver's license or state ID card, you will need these papers to get your driver's license or state ID card. The facility agent may be able to help you get some of these documents.

If you aren't able to get all the papers you need for a state ID card before you are released, you should ask your parole agent to refer you to an agency that may be able to help you get the rest of the papers. One organization that provides assistance obtaining documents and state ID cards is: Degage Ministries, 144 South Division, Grand Rapids, MI 49503; tel. 616-454-1661. You can find out about other organizations that help you get important papers and ID at www.reentryhelp.org.

1) Papers to get before you're released

Birth certificate

Your birth certificate can help you prove your identity, age, and birthdate. If you are a U.S. citizen, you may also need it to get Medicaid. If you were born in Michigan, you must have a photo ID and pay \$26. Talk to your facility agent or contact the Michigan State Vital Records Office at 201 Townsend St., Lansing, MI 48913 for help. If you have questions after you are released, talk to your parole agent or call Vital Records at 517-335-8666.

Other papers showing who you are

There are other papers that you can use to help prove who you are. Some of these papers might be hard to get. So, if you get them, you should keep them in a safe place so you don't lose them. You can work on getting some of these documents together before you're released. Examples of papers that you can use to help prove who you are include photo identification cards issued by government agencies (in addition to your prison ID card), military ID cards or discharge papers, marriage licenses, divorce decrees, birth certificates for your children, immigration documents, car titles or registration, tribal ID cards, adoption records, school records, driver's education certificates, bank cards or account statements, paychecks, pay stubs, lease agreements, DHS cards or documents, and documents that are issued by the government, like your voter registration card.

2) Documents to get after you're released

There are some documents that you can't get before you're released. But, these documents are really important, so you should get them as soon as possible once you're released. Once you have them, be sure to keep them in a safe place so they don't get lost.

State ID card and driver's license

Once you are released, you will need either a state ID card or a driver's license to help prove who you are. You will also need an ID card or license to get a job. If you have or can get a driver's license, you can use that as your ID. If you can't get a driver's license, you need to get a state ID card.

Where to apply

Go to your local Secretary of State office. To find the nearest office, look in the phone book, call 517-322-1460, or go to www.mich.gov/sos.

Getting a state ID card

A state ID card costs \$10 for most people. There is no charge if you're 65 or older, legally blind, or if the Secretary of State decides you can't have or keep a driver's license because you have a disability.

Getting a driver's license

In addition to the information you need for a state ID, you will need to prove you are able to drive. You may also need to pay any fines you owe.

What do you need to prove to get ID?

To get ID you need to prove: (a) who you are; (b) that you are legally in the United States; (c) that you live in Michigan; and (d) that you have a Social Security number or aren't eligible for one. If you need help getting enough proof, contact Degage Ministries at (616) 454-1661, or go to www.reentryhelp.org to learn about other organizations that can help.

a. Proving who you are

In order to get either a state ID card or driver's license, you will need proof of who you are. Many of the papers you can use to prove who you are, are listed above under "papers to get before you are released." These include things like a birth certificate, a marriage license, school records, divorce papers or prison ID. It's up to the Secretary of State to decide if you provided enough proof.

b. Proving you are in the U.S. legally

In order to get either a state ID card or driver's license, you will need to show that you are a U.S. citizen, or that you are a non-citizen who is legally in the U.S. You can prove this with a birth certificate, passport, or immigration documents.

c. Proving you have a Social Security number or can't get one

In order to get either a state ID card or driver's license, you will need to show that you have a Social Security number, or that you can't get one. You can prove this by showing your Social Security card, a W-2 statement, a paystub with your Social Security number on it, or other papers from Social Security. If you do not have a Social Security number, you will need a letter from Social Security saying that.

d. Proving you live in Michigan

To get a driver's license or state ID, you'll also need to prove you live in Michigan at a particular address. You can use your parole order, notice of release, or letter from a parole officer if written in the last 30 days. Be sure that you keep your parole order or notice of release in a safe place and apply for an ID right away. Other papers that you can use to help prove where you will live once you're released include: lease agreements; applications for places to live; checks, money orders, or receipts for a security deposit or first month's rent; utility hook up in your name; and letters from a shelter verifying that you live there. It's up to the Secretary of State to decide if you have enough proof.

My driver's license has expired. How do I get a new one?

You'll have to take a written test if your license has been expired for four or more years.

My license has been suspended. Can I renew it?

No. You can't renew your license if your driver record shows six or more unpaid parking tickets, you owe other fees because of driving problems, or if your license has been suspended or revoked. Depending on why you lost your license, you may have to go to a hearing to ask for it back. You'll also probably have to pay a fee. The Secretary of State's office can tell you why you lost your license and what you have to do to get it back. If you need help getting your license back, you may want to try and find an attorney.

If you lost your license because of convictions related to drugs or alcohol, you will need to prove that you are clean and sober. It is a good idea to participate in treatment programs and support groups, like AA or NA. Make sure to keep records of all the programs and support groups you attend, because you will need those records when you try to get your license back.

I don't know where my license is. What now?

You can apply for another license. You'll need to take some type of ID with you when you go, like your birth certificate, marriage license, or photo ID cards from a Michigan governmental agency, like DHS.

Social Security card

You need a Social Security card to get a job and a driver's license. There is no charge. You need to apply in person to get your card when you are released. You will need a picture ID, but they may not accept your prison ID. You must be interviewed at a local Social Security branch office. Call the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213 for help. It will take several weeks for the card to be mailed. In the meantime, you can get a receipt that shows that you've applied for a card. If you think someone stole your social security number, call Social Security as soon as you can and tell them about it.

CHECK YOUR CRIMINAL HISTORY

Why should I get a copy of my criminal history?

It's important to review your criminal history. You might need to answer questions about your convictions to get a job or housing. If you don't fill out the forms correctly because you don't know what is on your record, the employer or landlord may think you are lying. You could be fired for lying. Also, lots of criminal histories have mistakes. If yours is wrong, it could lead to a lot of problems. It could be even harder to find a job or a place to live. Sometimes records are wrong because someone made a mistake. But sometimes records are wrong because someone else is using your name and personal information.

Do I have to wait until I'm released to check my history?

No. You can check your history while you're locked up. It should be available on the Pre-Sentence Investigation (PSI) Report you should have received. You can also have a friend or family member help you get a copy of your history. See below.

How can I check my criminal history?

First, get a copy of your criminal history. If you didn't get a job or an apartment because of your record, you can ask the employer or landlord for a copy of the record they used. You can also get a copy of your Michigan state police record before you are released by having a friend or family member go online. The website address is www.michigan.gov. Once they're there, click on "online services," "Michigan State Police," then "ICHAT." This record will show only Michigan convictions, not convictions in other states. If your friend or family member doesn't have a computer, they can go to any public library and use one there for free. They'll have to pay \$10 to get your record. If they don't have \$10, they can click on "FAQs" on this website for information about how to get a free copy of your record. Once they have the record, have them mail it to you at the prison. Be sure that they mail you only your own history, and not anyone else's. You're not allowed to receive any other prisoner's criminal history through the mail.

You can also get a copy of your local police record at your local police station. The Grand Rapids Police Department is at 1 Monroe Center NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Tel. 616-456-3400. It costs about \$6 for a copy. A local record may not include convictions outside of the city that made the record.

My record is wrong. Can I change it?

Yes. But first you need to get a certified copy of the judgment of conviction in your case. You can do this by writing to or going to the court where you were convicted and asking for one. You may need to pay a few dollars for this.

If your record has incorrect information about one of your convictions, send the certified copy of the judgment in that case, and a letter explaining the problem with your record to: Michigan State Police – CJIC, Attn. Record Correction, P.O. Box 30634, Lansing, MI 48913. Be sure to include your current address and phone number, if you have one, so they can

contact you if they need something. If the record was produced by a private company, and not the State Police, you need to contact the company that produced the record.

If your record contains a conviction that does not belong to you, you will need a copy of your fingerprints. Go to a police station to get your fingerprints taken. The police may do a warrant search. You may have to pay money to get your fingerprints taken. Send your fingerprints, your conviction record, and a letter explaining your problem to the Michigan State Police.

What if my record shows an arrest, but the case was dropped?

If you were arrested but not convicted, or if your case was dismissed or “nolle prossed,” you should file a Motion for Return of Fingerprints in order to get the arrest removed from your record. Contact the court where you were prosecuted for a motion form, or get one at reentry.mplp.org.

What if my record shows an arrest for a parole or probation violation?

If you were arrested for a parole or probation violation, this may show up as a separate case on your record. In order to get that corrected, you should contact the Michigan State Police at 517-322-5531. If you have problems, contact an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan.

How long will my conviction stay on my record?

In most cases, your convictions will stay on your record for the rest of your life. If you have only one state conviction, you can try to get the conviction removed from your record. This is called expungement. You cannot get an expungement if you have more than one state conviction. For example, if you have one felony and one misdemeanor, you cannot get an expungement. Some very serious offenses cannot be expunged. You must wait at least five years after you are released from prison or jail before you apply. You will be able to find forms to request an expungement on reentry.mplp.org.

If you have a federal conviction, you cannot get an expungement. You may be eligible to apply for a pardon. Forms are available at: www.usdoj.gov/pardon. You can also seek a pardon for state convictions. Information is available at: reentry.mplp.org.

Where can I go for help?

If you have problems or need more help, you can call the Michigan State Police at 517-322-5531. If you can't resolve the problem, you should talk to a lawyer. If you can't afford a lawyer contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan at 616-774-0672 or 800-442-2777.

PART II: EMPLOYMENT

FINDING A JOB

What Should I Say on Job Applications About My Criminal Record?

Be honest. Most employers do background checks and will find out about your record anyway. If you lie, they'll know. If a job application asks if you have a criminal record, you can always write "yes, will explain." Then you can talk about your record in your job interview. It's important to have a copy of your record so that you know exactly what your convictions were for and how old they are. Also, read the question carefully. If it asks about convictions in the last 5 years and your conviction is 10 years old, you don't have to put it down.

No One Will Hire Me Because of My Record. What Should I Do?

Many employers do not want to hire people with records. Because it can be hard for you to know which employers might hire you, your best bet is to work with an agency that specializes in hiring people with records. To get a referral to an agency that can help you find a job, contact the Reentry Employment Resource Center at 616-560-9045. Or go to www.reentryhelp.org for information about organizations that can help you find a job.

YOUR EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

What Can An Employer Ask Me About My Criminal Record?

Employers can ask if you have convictions and if you have felony arrests. In most cases, employers cannot ask about misdemeanor arrests that did not result in a conviction. However, misdemeanor arrests may still show up on a background check.

Can an Employer Choose Not to Hire Me Because I Have a Record?

It depends. Employers can generally make decisions about whom to hire. In some cases there are laws that prevent employers from hiring people with criminal records. However, employers who refuse to hire anyone with a criminal record, even though the record has nothing to do with the job, may be violating laws against race discrimination. If an employer refuses to hire anyone with a record, call the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) at 1-800-669-6820, or contact an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan.

Can an Employer Fire Me Because I Have a Record?

It depends. See the answer to the question above. In addition, if you are a member of a union, the employer usually needs a very good reason to fire you, and an old record is probably not enough. Talk to your union for help.

What If the Employer Wants to Hire Me, but Says There Is a Law Against Hiring People with Records for that Job?

In some jobs – especially healthcare, daycare, private security, transportation, and government employment – there are laws or policies that prevent employers from hiring people with certain convictions. However, these laws are very complicated. An employer may think you can't work, even though you can. Talk to an attorney, or go to reentry.mplp.org for more information.

If I'm Fired Because I Have a Criminal Record, Can I Get Unemployment?

If you are otherwise qualified for unemployment benefits, the fact that you have a criminal record won't prevent you from getting them. However, if you lied on your job application or if you committed a crime related to your job (e.g. stealing from your employer), that could be considered misconduct. If you commit misconduct, you cannot get unemployment.

What If I'm Denied an Occupational License Because of My Record?

For some jobs, like being a barber or plumber or taxi driver, you need a license. If you are denied a license because of your record, you can appeal. The appeal is your chance to prove that your record shouldn't stop you from getting the license. Use things like your work history, letters of recommendation, educational/vocational certificates, and volunteer activities to show you are a good person who deserves the license. You may want to ask an attorney for help with your appeal. If you cannot afford an attorney, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan for help.

Should I Tell My Employer If I Get Re-Arrested or Get a New Conviction?

It depends. In certain fields, particularly long-term care and education, you are legally required to tell your employer about certain arrests or convictions. If you do not report a new arrest or conviction, you could be prosecuted. If you are unsure about whether you have to report your arrest or conviction, ask your defense attorney. If you are not legally required to tell your employer, it is up to you whether to do so. Before you decide, think about whether your employer will find out anyway through a regular background check, and about how your employer will react to the news.

Can I See a Copy of the Record an Employer Used to Deny Me a Job?

Yes. If an employer used a credit reporting agency to get your record, the employer must show you your record before denying you a job. You can also get a copy of your record by contacting the company that prepared the record. If mistakes on the record cost you a job, contact an attorney.

How Can I Get More Information?

For more information, go to: reentry.mplp.org. To find an attorney, contact the Michigan State Bar Lawyer Referral Service at 800-968-0738. If you cannot afford an attorney, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan.

PART III: YOUR FAMILY

CHILD SUPPORT

This section will help you understand the laws related to child support. It is very important to pay your child support. If you don't pay your child support, you can lose your driver's license, be taken to court, and be put in jail. The state can also take all the money out of your bank account. If you can't pay your support, you need to make sure the Court knows this and adjusts your payment amount.

I can't afford to pay my support. What can I do?

You can file a paper with the court asking them to lower your support. You have to file the paper in the same court that issued the child support order. If you have more than one child

or court case, you'll have to file a paper for each child or case. These cases might be in different courts. The prison law library should have a self-help kit you can use to do this. If not, have a friend or family member get a kit for you at reentry.mplp.org. Once you are released, you should use the self-help kits available at the Friend of the Court.

Do I have to pay child support while I'm locked up?

You don't have to pay IF you get your support order changed first. If you don't tell the Court that you are locked up, or if you can afford to pay, you still have to pay. You can file papers to change the amount of child support you owe now and in the future. But, you can't go back and change the amount you owe for the past. The law doesn't allow judges to erase the debt later because you were locked up or didn't have the money to pay. That is why it is so important to change your support as soon as you are locked up.

What papers do I need to reduce my child support?

If possible, you should file a motion with the court to "suspend" your child support. Your prison law library should have forms you can use. If you can't file a motion, you should at least send the Friend of the Court a letter asking that your support be stopped while you are incarcerated. You must send the letter to the Friend of the Court office in the county where your child's case is at. You must send one letter for each case. Be sure to keep copies! Once you're released and get a job, the court can take up to 65% of what you earn to pay current and/or overdue child support.

Do I have to tell the Friend of the Court when I'm released?

Yes. You've been ordered to keep telling the court where you're living and working. If you don't, you could get in trouble. You could also be left out of court proceedings if the court can't find you.

What if I will live with the child's other parent once I'm released?

You should not have to pay child support for a child that is living with you. If you are being charged support even though you are living with the child, you should file a motion right away. You may still have to make payments on any back support you owe.

I owe a lot of money and I can't afford to pay it. What can I do?

First, find out to whom you owe the money. You may owe money to the other parent. If your child was on cash welfare, you may owe money to the State. If you owe child support to the other parent, that parent can agree to forgive the support you owe. You must get a notarized statement from the other parent saying that she or he will forgive the debt and give that to the Friend of the Court.

If you owe child support to the State, go to the Friend of the Court and apply for an "incarceration credit." If you are given an "incarceration credit," the State may forgive some of the debt that added up while you were incarcerated.

You can also file a paper with the court that issued the child support order and ask for a payment plan. If the money is owed to the other parent, the other parent will have to agree before you can do a payment plan. If the money is owed to the State, the State will have to agree. If you do a payment plan, sometimes the Court will forgive some of the debt. Contact the Friend of the Court for forms that can help you apply for a repayment plan.

Where can I go for help?

For a self-help kit, go to reentry.mplp.org. You should also talk to your caseworker at the Friend of the Court. If you still need legal help after you are released, you should call a lawyer.

YOUR CHILDREN

Can I see my children?

Your rights to see your children will depend in part on your parole conditions. You should always make sure you understand exactly what you can or cannot do. You also need to see if there are any other court papers saying what you can and cannot do with your children, such as papers in an abuse or neglect case. Depending on what your crime was and how long you were locked up, a court may have taken away all your rights as a parent. If they did this, you cannot see or talk to your children unless the people who are taking care of your children agree.

The other parent has custody. How can I see my kids when I am released?

First, find out whether the other parent has a custody order. If there is a court order, it probably gives you parenting time. You should check with the Court or Friend of the Court to see what the order says and to get a copy. If you have parenting time, you should contact the other parent after you are released to arrange times to see your children according to the court order. You should not take the children on an overnight visit unless you have a safe and suitable place for them to stay. If you have not seen the children for a while, you may want to talk to the other parent about the best way to help them become comfortable with you again. If there is no custody or parenting time order, then you should contact the other parent to see what can be arranged.

What if the other parent and I cannot agree on parenting time?

You can ask for help in solving the situation. If the other parent is willing to meet with you, contact the Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan. A trained mediator may be able to help the two of you work out a schedule. Call 616-774-0121. If this doesn't work, you will have to file court papers asking for parenting time. The Friend of the Court should be able to tell you what to file. If you need help filing a motion, go to the Legal Assistance Center on the 5th Floor of the Kent County Courthouse, 180 Ottawa, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, tel. 616-632-6000.

I think my children have a guardian. How can I find out?

Call or write the Probate Court where the guardianship was granted. They'll tell you if the guardianship is still in place. If it is, you might not be able to see your children right away unless the guardian is willing. You can file a paper with the court asking the court to let you see your children or end the guardianship. The Probate Court can tell you what papers you need. The Kent County Probate Court is at 180 Ottawa, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, tel. 616-632-5440. It is a good idea to try and see if a lawyer can help you. If you cannot afford a lawyer, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan at 616-774-0672 or 1-800-442-2777.

I don't know where my children are. How can I find out?

It depends. If there aren't any court orders saying otherwise, you can contact the person who had your children last. If you don't know where that person is, try contacting people who know where he or she might be. You can also check the court records where your child last lived. If there is a child support order, you might be able to find out where your children are from the County Friend of the Court who is monitoring that order.

I want to get custody of my children. How do I do it?

Getting custody of your children can be very difficult. It can take a long time and cost a lot of money. You should have a good reason for asking for custody and you should wait until you have been out of prison for a while before you file papers. If you and the other parent have never been to court, you'll have to file for custody. If you have been to court and there's a court order, you'll have to file a motion with the court asking them to change the order so that you have custody.

Where can I get help with parenting issues?

If you need parenting classes, family reunification help, or other family services, go to www.reentryhelp.org to find an organization that has the services you need.

My parole conditions say that I cannot be around children. How can I see my own kids?

If your parole conditions say that you cannot have contact with children, but you want to have contact with your own children, ask your parole officer to request that your conditions be modified. You should have evidence to show that you aren't dangerous (like good reports from sex offender therapy?), and that the person who has custody of the child wants you to have contact.

I think my children have been taken away. How can I find out?

CPS (Children’s Protective Services) is the agency in charge of protecting children. CPS is a part of the Department of Human Services. If you think your children may have been taken away, you should contact CPS at 616-247-6300. But, depending on the status of the case, CPS might not tell you anything.

If CPS took away your children, but has not yet ended your rights as a parent, you might be able to work with CPS. They are supposed to help you develop a plan to return your children to you. It might take a long time. You may have to make changes in your life and you will have to report regularly to your CPS worker.

If CPS wants to take away your rights to your children, they must tell you this. You also have the right to a court-appointed attorney if you cannot afford one. An attorney should have been appointed for you if CPS got involved in a court case. Always be sure to tell the Court you want a court-appointed attorney if CPS is involved.

PART IV: MEETING YOUR BASIC NEEDS

FOOD STAMPS

Food Stamps can help you buy food. In Michigan, the Food Stamp program is called the “Food Assistance Program” or FAP. Whether you can get food stamps depends on how much income you have in your household. If you are eligible, you will receive a card called a “Bridge Card” that you can use like an ATM debit card to buy food. The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) runs the program. Under current rules, you can’t apply for or receive Food Stamps until you are released from prison. If you want an estimate on how much Food Assistance you should receive, call the Food and Nutrition Program Helpline 1-800-481-4989 after you are released.

How do I apply?

You must file an application form with DHS. Ask if the prison has copies of the application form. If so, start filling it out a week or two before you get out, if you know where you will live, and whom you will live with. Check the box on the front page that says you want “food assistance.” Do not sign and date the form until you are released. Drop the form off at or mail it to Kent County DHS at 415 Franklin SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507 right away. DHS must accept the form, even if it is not complete, but they may not be able to meet with you that day. You may need to provide more information and papers within a couple of weeks so your application is complete. If you need help with the form or getting any papers, you can ask DHS for help. If you do not have transportation or if you have a job that makes it hard to go to appointments, ask DHS for a telephone interview because you have a hardship (no transportation or job conflicts).

What if I'm denied?

If you are denied Food Stamps, you should receive written notice from DHS. Call the Food and Nutrition Program Helpline 1-800-481-4989 if you have questions about it or want to know what you can do. If you want to appeal, you can request a hearing. For help, call Legal Aid of Western Michigan at 616-774-0672 or 1-800-442-2777.

What papers will I need?

You will need papers to prove who you are. You can use your prison ID to prove your identity. You may also need papers to show how much income your new household receives, your housing and utility costs (if any), and the child support or childcare costs you pay (if any). If you are age 60 or older, or you know you will receive disability benefits, bring papers to show any regular monthly medical expenses. You don't need all these papers on the day you apply, but will have to send them in within 10 days. If you need help getting these papers, DHS must help or give you a little more time, if you ask. If you don't have a steady address, you can pick up your "Bridge Card" (the debit card you use to buy food) at DHS or have DHS mail it somewhere for you.

How fast will I get Food Stamps?

If you have very little income or savings, tell the DHS office that you want "expedited" (fast) Food Stamps. There is a separate paper called the "Filing Document" (DHS form 1171F) that you need to fill out. DHS should set up an interview with you (which can be by phone) within 1 business day. If you qualify, you should get food stamps in 7 days. Otherwise, you should start receiving Food Stamps in about 30 days. If you don't have a decision within this time, contact your caseworker. If you can't reach the worker, contact the supervisor. If this doesn't work, call the Helpline at 1-800-481-4989.

I'm moving back in with my family. Can I get Food Stamps?

Maybe. If you are married and living with your spouse, DHS must consider your spouse's income. DHS must also consider the income of parents and their children under age 22 who live together (whether or not the two parents are married to each other). If you are under 22 and live with your parent or stepparent, their income will be counted against you. Other family members who live together are treated like roommates (see next question).

I'm moving in with people who I'm not related to. Can I get Food Stamps?

Maybe. It depends on how you buy and make your food. If you and your roommates buy and cook your food separately, DHS is not supposed to count their income. You must tell DHS who lives with you on the application. But if you keep your food separate, you should check the box "no" when it asks if you "buy, fix, or eat food" with others in the house. If you want to find out how much you'll get in food stamps if you eat with the other people versus if you eat separately, call the Food and Nutrition Helpline 1-800-481-4989.

What if I have outstanding warrants or violate parole?

When you apply for or renew Food Stamps, DHS can run a national warrant search. If you have outstanding felony warrants or you violate a condition of your parole or probation, you can't get Food Stamps. You might also be arrested.

I have questions about or problems with Food Stamps. Whom can I call?

After you are released, call the Kent County DHS office at 616-247-6000. Or you can call the Food and Nutrition Program Helpline at 1-800-481-4989. The Helpline is not connected with DHS. Call weekdays from 9:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M. If no one is available, leave a message. Someone will call you back. The Helpline staff can tell you if you will qualify, how to apply, and how to make sure you get the right amount. They can also help you solve problems.

HOUSING

Where can I live?

Your parole officer must approve where you will live before you are released. Talk to your parole officer about parole conditions that may apply to you. For example: Can you live with or near children? Near schools? Can you live with others who have criminal records?

Where can I get help with housing?

Several agencies help released prisoners with transitional housing, or rent assistance. Some of those agencies are:

- Community Rebuilders.....616-458-5102
- Dwelling Place.....616-454-0928
- Inner City Christian Federation.....616-336-9333
- Project Rehab Transitional Housing.....616-776-0891

You can also go to www.reentryhelp.org to find out about other organizations that provide housing assistance.

What if I become homeless?

Call the Salvation Army at 616-459-9468. They will help you find a place to stay for the short term, and can also help you find permanent housing. Several shelters that provide housing are Guiding Light Mission, 255 S. Division, Grand Rapids, tel. 616-451-0236, and Mel Trotter Mission, 225 Commerce Ave. SW, Grand Rapids, tel. 616-454-8249.

Can my landlord ask about my criminal history?

A landlord can ask about your criminal history and can refuse to rent to you because of your record. But, if you have a current lease, the landlord cannot evict you just because you have a criminal record, unless the lease allows it or you lied on the application.

Can I move in with someone else?

If you want to move in with someone who owns their own home, you can, as long as it is ok with your parole officer. If you want to move in with someone who rents or who lives in a mobile home park, always check to see if there is a lease or other written rules. The other tenants may have to tell their landlord about you and ask for the landlord's permission. They should talk to a lawyer if they have questions about their lease. They should also talk to a lawyer if they are charged on their utility bill for any old bills in your name, since this may not be legal. See "utilities" section on page 16.

I'm on the Sex Offender Registry. Where can I live?

You will not be able to live within 1000 feet of a school. In addition, your parole conditions may prevent you from living within 1000 feet of a daycare center. It is very important to check with your parole officer before deciding on a place to live or before moving to a new place. If you committed your sex offense when you were very young, the 1000 feet restriction may not apply to you. Contact an attorney or Legal Aid of Western Michigan for help.

Even though you cannot live permanently within 1000 feet of a school, you should still be able to stay overnight, for at least a short time, in an emergency shelter, such as one of the missions.

Because many landlords will not rent to people on the Sex Offender Registry, it may be hard for you to find a place to live. Many apartment complexes check the Sex Offender Registry, so it may be easier to rent from a private landlord. When you find a place, make sure to get a written lease that lasts for at least a year. Once you have a lease, the landlord cannot evict you just because you are on the registry.

Can I move into subsidized housing?

Housing rules that apply to public housing and Section 8 can be confusing. Your family or parole officer might think you can't live in public housing or Section 8, even though you can. Or they may think you are allowed to live there, when you can't. If you have questions or need help, talk to a lawyer. If you can't afford one, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan at 616-774-0672 or 1-800-442-2777.

What is "Subsidized housing" – This includes public housing owned by a Housing Commission or the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. It also includes Section 8, which usually involves a private landlord. In most subsidized housing, the rent you pay is based on your family size and income.

Drug-related activity – If you were convicted for producing methamphetamine, you can never live in any kind of subsidized housing. If you were evicted from public or Section 8 housing because of drug-related activity (whether or not there was a conviction), you can't move back in for at least three years, unless the subsidized housing provider agrees you are rehabilitated (see below).

Other convictions – If you will be listed on the sex offender registry for the rest of your life, you can never live in subsidized housing. If you are listed on the registry for a shorter period of time, you may be eligible for subsidized housing, though it can still be difficult to get admitted. For other types of convictions, each subsidized housing provider will have rules on whether they have to consider your criminal record, and how many years back they must look.

Past criminal activities - A subsidized housing provider can consider your past criminal activities when deciding whether to rent to you. This can include drug use, violent activities, and other criminal acts that may threaten other residents.

Proof of rehabilitation – Even if you can't get into Section 8 or public housing because of your criminal record or past criminal activities, you can ask the landlord to consider proof that you have been rehabilitated. You will need to show papers proving what has changed since you were convicted. You can use things like certificates from a drug treatment program, drug drop results, a GED diploma, a vocational certificate, or letters of support. If the landlord still refuses to rent to you, you may have the right to request a grievance hearing or other meeting. Be sure you don't miss any deadlines if you want to appeal. You should talk to Legal Aid of Western Michigan right away about whether you can do this and see if they can help you.

Criminal activities after you move in – If you move into subsidized housing, a landlord can evict you from subsidized housing if you, someone you live with, or a guest, are involved in new criminal activities after you move in. The landlord can evict you even if the activities happened away from the place you are renting and did not result in a conviction. The landlord can evict you if you have felony warrants or are violating your parole or probation. Always ask for help from Legal Aid of Western Michigan if a landlord tries to evict you or your roommates from subsidized housing.

HEALTHCARE

I don't have health insurance. Can anyone help me?

Maybe. You might be eligible for health insurance or health coverage through Medicaid, the Adult Medical Program, or the Kent Health Plan. To find out what types of programs you could receive, contact the Department of Human Services at 616-247-6000. Most insurance programs have some co-payments or deductibles you have to pay.

Can I get Medicaid?

Medicaid is available only to certain types of people. You might be able to get Medicaid if you are low income and:

- you are under age 21 (but rules can be different for children of different ages)
- you are a parent who is living with your child or stepchild under age 18

- you are the primary caregiver for a child under 18 to whom you are related
- you are age 65 or older
- you are disabled according to the state’s disability rules. (See “disability” section, below.)

Can I get health coverage from the Adult Medical Program (AMP)?

Once or twice a year, the Department of Human Services opens up a health coverage program to people who have no insurance and a very low income. It is called the Adult Medical Program. It is also called “Kent Health Plan, Plan A”. The program is closed to new members most of the year. To find out if you can apply for AMP, call DHS at 616-247-6000.

The Adult Medical Program isn’t open. Now what?

You may be able to apply for coverage through “Kent Health Plan, Plan B.” Kent Health Plan, Plan B helps uninsured adults with basic preventive services and some prescription drugs. You can also apply to Project Access, which links patients with volunteer health care providers. Their number is 616-459-1111 ext. 1.

How do I apply for Medicaid and the Adult Medical Program?

You can apply for Medicaid and AMP at DHS (Department of Human Services). Check the box that says you want “medical assistance.” You have to qualify for the program. When you apply, you’ll need to take documents with you that show that you don’t have much money, like bank statements. You’ll also need to take other documents, like your prison identification, birth certificate and your Social Security card. You can be turned down for Medicaid even if you think you don’t have much money. Call DHS at 616-247-6000 if you’d like to apply. The AMP program is usually open to new members only a couple of months each year. If it is closed when you are released, you should contact Kent Health Plan, Plan B.

How do I apply for the Kent Health Plan B, Plan B?

Contact the Kent Health Plan at 616-726-8204 ext. 1, to find out if applications are being accepted and where to apply. You can’t apply until you’re released. Once you’re released, you should call as soon as possible.

What if I’m hospitalized and can’t afford hospital care?

Talk to the hospital about whether they can offer any financial assistance.

I can’t afford the co-payments for my prescriptions. What can I do?

If you have Medicaid, you should tell your pharmacy that you cannot afford your co-pay. You should be able to get at least the first prescription without paying the co-pay. After that, you may need to show that you are trying to pay the co-pays you owe before your next prescription will be filled. If you have problems getting a prescription filled you may be able to get help from the Medicaid Customer Service line at 1-800-642-3195. If you need prescriptions for a life-threatening condition, you may be able to get assistance from the United Way. Call 211 or 616-459-2255. Talk to your doctor’s office or clinic to see if they

can help. Or contact the Partnership for Prescription Assistance at 1-888-477-2660. Target and Walmart also have an extensive list of prescription medications that patients can get for \$4. Low cost medication is also available at Bill's Pills, at 616-233-9126.

Where else can I go for health services?

There are several other places in Kent County that may be able to help you get healthcare. These include:

- Baxter Community Center: 935 Baxter SE, B Level, Grand Rapids, 616-456-5310
- Planned Parenthood (for birth control information and services): 425 Cherry St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, 616-774-7005
- Kent Health Plan: 616-726-8204 ext. 1
- Cherry Street Health Services: various locations in Grand Rapids, 616-235-7272
- St. Mary's Health Services: 616-913-8075
- Heartside Clinic: 359 South Division, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, 616-643-3800
- Kent County Health Dept.: 700 Fuller NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, 616-336-3030
- Partnership for Prescription Assistance: 1-888-477-2660
- Project Access: 616-459-1111 ext. 1
- United Way: 211 or 616-459-2255
- Veteran's Administration (for veterans): 1-877-222-8387
- VA Outpatient Clinic: 3019 Coit NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505, 616-365-9575
- Veterans Outreach Center: 1940 Eastern SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507, 616-243-0385
- Health Care for Homeless Veterans: 349 S. Division, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, 616-234-0220

You can find out about other health services at www.reentryhelp.org.

I need dental care. Where can I go?

There are several different places you can go for dental care. They are listed below.

- Cherry Street Health Services: various locations in Grand Rapids, 616-235-7289. If you can't get an appointment when you call that number, ask about other Cherry Street locations.
- Adult Dental Services Program: various locations, 616-776-2373
- GRCC Dental Hygiene Clinic (cleanings and X-rays only): 616-234-4237

I don't have health insurance yet and I need my prescriptions refilled now. Who can help me?

If you need your prescriptions refilled but don't have health insurance, you can contact these two agencies for help. They can help you get your medication at low or no cost.

- Salvation Army: 1215 E. Fulton, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, 616-459-3433
- West MI Center for Family Health: 1425 Michigan NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, 616-233-0933

What should I do if I'm denied Medicaid or AMP?

Contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan at 616-774-0672 to find out whether the decision looks right. Legal Aid will help you figure out whether you have a case, or whether you need an attorney to work on it. If you are denied Medicaid or AMP when you should be eligible, Legal Aid may be able to help you.

DISABILITY BENEFITS

If you can prove you can't work because you're disabled, there are programs that can help you support yourself. This section will help you understand some of those programs.

- **Supplement Security Income (SSI)** is a program of the Social Security Administration (SSA). It's for people who are disabled and don't have much money. Some people get both SSI and "Social Security Disability benefits." Social security disability benefits are based on the taxes you paid at any jobs you had. If you qualify for SSI you will also get Medicaid based on disability.
- **The State Disability Program (SDA)** is a program of the Department of Human Services. SDA pays about \$250 per month, but can help you while you apply for SSI. If you qualify for SDA, you may be able to get Medicaid. If you qualify for Medicaid, and your income is very low, you may be able to get SDA.

Am I disabled?

You will not be considered "disabled" just because you are coming out of prison. The Social Security Administration ("Social Security") decides if you are disabled based on your medical records, education and job record. Even if you think you can't work, Social Security may deny you SSI if your medical records don't meet Social Security's disability rules. In general, you must have medical records that show that there is no job you can do (even a "sit down" job) for 12 months. Or they must show you are likely to die from your condition within 12 months. The Department of Human Services decides if you qualify for SDA.

How long does it take to get SSI or SDA?

It can take several months and sometimes years to start getting SSI. If you need money right away, you can ask Social Security for up to \$200 in emergency benefits. If you get this money, it'll be taken out of the first check. You can also apply for State Disability Assistance (SDA) at Kent County DHS. It may take 2 or more months to get SDA.

How do I apply for SSI?

Your prison should have copies of the application form. You can start to apply 30 days before you're released. If you apply sooner than that, Social Security will deny you because you're locked up. If you are already out of prison, call 1-800-772-1213 to apply over the phone or find the nearest local Social Security office where you can apply in person.

When you apply, the Social Security office will run a national warrant search. If you have outstanding felony warrants or are violating a condition of your parole or probation, you can't get SSI. You might also get arrested. If you are denied SSI because of an outstanding warrant or a violation of parole or probation, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan for assistance.

How do I apply for SDA?

You fill out the application form and turn it into the Kent County Department of Human Services. The address is 415 Franklin SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507. You can turn in the application as soon as you are released. You should also check the box to ask for Medical Assistance. It will usually take 60-90 days for you to receive a decision. In most cases, you will have to show you have also applied for SSI.

I was getting SSI before I went to prison. Can I still get my checks?

Maybe. If you were getting SSI before you were locked up, your checks were automatically stopped when you went to prison. You must show the Social Security office proof that you have been officially released before the checks can start up again. In some cases you may need to reapply.

Can I get SSI based on a disability that started when I committed a felony?

Probably not. If you became disabled as a result of committing a felony on or after October 19, 1980, you will never be able to get SSI based on that disability.

Can I get SSI based on a disability that started or got worse in prison?

Maybe. You won't be able to apply until 30 days before you are released. If your disability is related to your commission of a felony, you won't be able to get SSI based on that condition.

I was disabled before I was locked up, but never applied. Can I apply now?

Yes, you can apply for SSI anytime starting 30 days before your release date.

I'm living in a half-way house as a condition of my parole. Can I get SSI?

Probably not. Social Security doesn't pay SSI to people living in halfway houses under the control of the Department of Corrections or Bureau of Prisons. You can apply 30 days before you're released from the halfway house or if you switch to a tether program.

Where can I get help?

It can be very difficult to get SSI or SDA unless you have an attorney or paralegal helping you. If you are denied SSI and SDA, call Legal Aid of Western Michigan at 616-774-0672 or 1-800-442-2777. Legal Aid will not get involved in helping you with an application, but will only get involved if you have been denied after you applied. If Legal Aid thinks you have a case, Legal Aid will either represent you or help you find a lawyer.

OTHER CASH ASSISTANCE

Family Independence Program – If you will be moving back in with your children or stepchildren, or you are acting as a parent for minor children to whom you are related (grandchildren, nieces, nephews, cousins, etc.), you may be able to qualify for Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits. If you are moving in with your own children who receive FIP, you should be added to your children’s FIP case, unless a guardian has been appointed for your children. The adult receiving FIP for your children can ask their caseworker at the Department of Human Services to put you on the FIP case on the date you are released. If the children don’t receive FIP, you should apply for FIP as soon as you are released.

State Disability Assistance for Caregivers - If a doctor says you are needed for at least 90 days to care for someone who is completely disabled (other than your spouse or child), you might be able to qualify for State Disability Assistance even though you are not disabled yourself. You must live with this person. You need to show you are needed to provide personal care services. These include cooking, laundry, shopping, errands, light cleaning, non-nursing personal care (bathing, dressing, etc.) and assistance with medication.

UTILITIES

I don’t have money for a utility deposit. Who can help?

If you need help paying a deposit to turn on utilities, the State Emergency Relief (SER) program may be able to help. You will have to be able to show how you will pay the bill once it is on. Apply for SER at the Kent County Department of Human Services.

I owe an old utility bill. Will this affect the bill of my housemates?

If you have unpaid utility bills in your name, it is possible that the utility company could try to add them on to the bill of someone else when you move into the household. If your housemates lived with you when the bills ran up, this may be legal. However, if you didn’t live together at that time, this should not happen. Contact the utility company’s customer service office and ask to have your old bill taken off. If that doesn’t work, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan at 616-774-0672.

Where can I go for help in paying old or high utility bills?

The SER program might be able to help. If you have income other than welfare – even if you didn’t earn enough to pay taxes - you may also get help from the State Home Heating Tax Credit. Some gas and electric companies will help you fill out forms for the latest tax year. There are volunteer groups that may be able to help you fill out the tax forms for past years. To find out what other organizations in Kent County help with tax forms or utility bills, call United Way at 211 or 616-459-2255 or 1-800-887-1107.

PART V: OTHER RIGHTS

VOTING

Can I vote if I have a felony conviction?

Yes. In Michigan you can vote once you are released from prison. (You cannot vote while you are incarcerated.) If you move to another state, you must check the laws of that state to see if you can vote.

GUN OWNERSHIP

Can I own a gun or live with someone who has a gun?

No. Because you have a felony record, you cannot own a gun. You also cannot possess anything that looks like a gun, such as a bb gun or an air pistol. You cannot possess ammunition, or any part of a gun. In addition, you may not be in the presence of anyone who has these items. If someone in your household has guns, you cannot live there, as long as the guns are there. This includes hunting rifles. Both the MDOC and the federal government have a “zero tolerance” policy about guns, and you will be returned to prison if you are found with a gun.

PART VI: RESOURCES

Detailed information about community resources in Kent County is available at www.reentryhelp.org.

AGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

Adult Dental Services Program	616-776-2373
Baxter Community Center	616-456-5310
Cherry Street Health Services	616-235-7272
Children’s Protective Services (CPS)	616-247-6300
Community Rebuilders	616-458-5102
Degage Ministries	616-454-1661
144 South Division, Grand Rapids, MI 49503	
Department of Human Services (DHS)	616-247-6000
415 Franklin SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507	
Dwelling Place	616-454-0928
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)	1-800-669-6820
Food and Nutrition Program Helpline	1-800-481-4989
Guiding Light Mission	616-451-0236
255 S. Division Ave., Grand Rapids, MI 49503	

Inner City Christian Federation	616-336-9333
Kent County Health Department	616-336-3030
Kent County Parole Office	616-356-0450
One Division Ave, NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503	
Kent Health Plan	616-726-8204 ext. 1
Medicaid Recipient Hotline	1-800-642-3195
Mel Trotter Mission	616-454-8249
225 Commerce Ave., SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503	
Michigan Department of Civil Rights	517-335-3165
Capitol Tower Building, Ste. 800, Lansing, MI 48933, TTY: (517) 241-1965	
Michigan State Police	517-322-5531
Criminal Justice Information Center, 7150 Harris Dr., Lansing MI 48913	
Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA)	517-373-8370
Michigan State Vital Records Office	517-335-8666
Michigan Dept. of Community Health, 3423 N. Martin Luther King Blvd, P. O. Box 30721, Lansing MI 48909	
Partnership for Prescription Assistance	1-888-477-2660
Planned Parenthood	616-774-7005
Project Access	616-459-1111 ext. 1
Project Rehab Transitional Housing	616-776-0891
Reentry Employment Resource Center	616-560-9045
Salvation Army	616-459-9468
Secretary of State	1-888-767-6424
Social Security Office	1-800-772-1213
50 College SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503	
United Way (general information about where to get help)	616-459-2255
United States Probation Office	616-456-2384
110 Michigan, Grand Rapids, MI 49503	
Veteran's Administration	1-877-222-8387

COURTS AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan	616-774-0121
Friend of the Court (FOC)	616-632-6888
82 Ionia, Grand Rapids, MI 49503	
Grand Rapids Lawyer Referral Service	616-855-0273
Kent County Circuit Court	616-632-5220

180 Ottawa NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Kent County Probate Court.....616-632-5440

180 Ottawa NW, Suite 2500, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Legal Aid of Western Michigan.....616-774-0672 or 1-800-442-2777

89 Ionia NW, Suite 400, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Legal Assistance Center.....616-632-6000

180 Ottawa, 5th Floor, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Michigan Bar Association Lawyer Referral.....1-800-968-0738

HELPFUL WEB SITES WHEN YOU ARE RELEASED

Reentry Resource Center: www.reentryhelp.org

Legal Aid of Western Michigan:

Reentry Law Project website: <http://reentry.mplp.org>

General Information: www.legalaidwestmich.org

Michigan Legal Aid: www.michiganlegalaid.org - search on “prisoner” for self-help materials

Michigan Food Stamp Partnership: www.foodstamphelp.org

State of Michigan: www.michigan.gov

Secretary of State: www.michigan.gov/sos

Social Security Administration: www.ssa.gov

Important Notice

Editors of this resource guide have made every effort to ensure that information contained in this resource guide is current as of June 2009. However, the editors cannot be responsible for any errors. Moreover, information can change without notice. Whenever possible, you should check to make sure the information is accurate.

This resource guide is meant to be informational only and is not meant to constitute legal advice in any situation.

If you need legal help or have questions about your particular situation, call a lawyer. The Legal Assistance Center (LAC) can provide guidance and forms to address your legal problems on your own. The LAC is located on 5th Floor of the Kent County Courthouse, or can be reached at 616-632-6000. If you would like to hire a lawyer, but need help finding one, call the Lawyer Referral Service at: 616-855-0273. If you can't afford a lawyer, call Legal Aid of Western Michigan at 616-774-0672 or 1-800-442-2777.

This resource guide was developed by Legal Aid of Western Michigan, based on a prior guide that was created and written for Legal Services of Eastern Michigan by the Center for Civil Justice. We are grateful to those organizations for allowing us to modify their guide for Kent County.

LEGAL AID OF WESTERN MICHIGAN IS PROHIBITED BY LAW FROM PROVIDING LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE INCARCERATED. LEGAL AID CANNOT HELP YOU UNTIL YOU ARE RELEASED FROM PRISON.

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