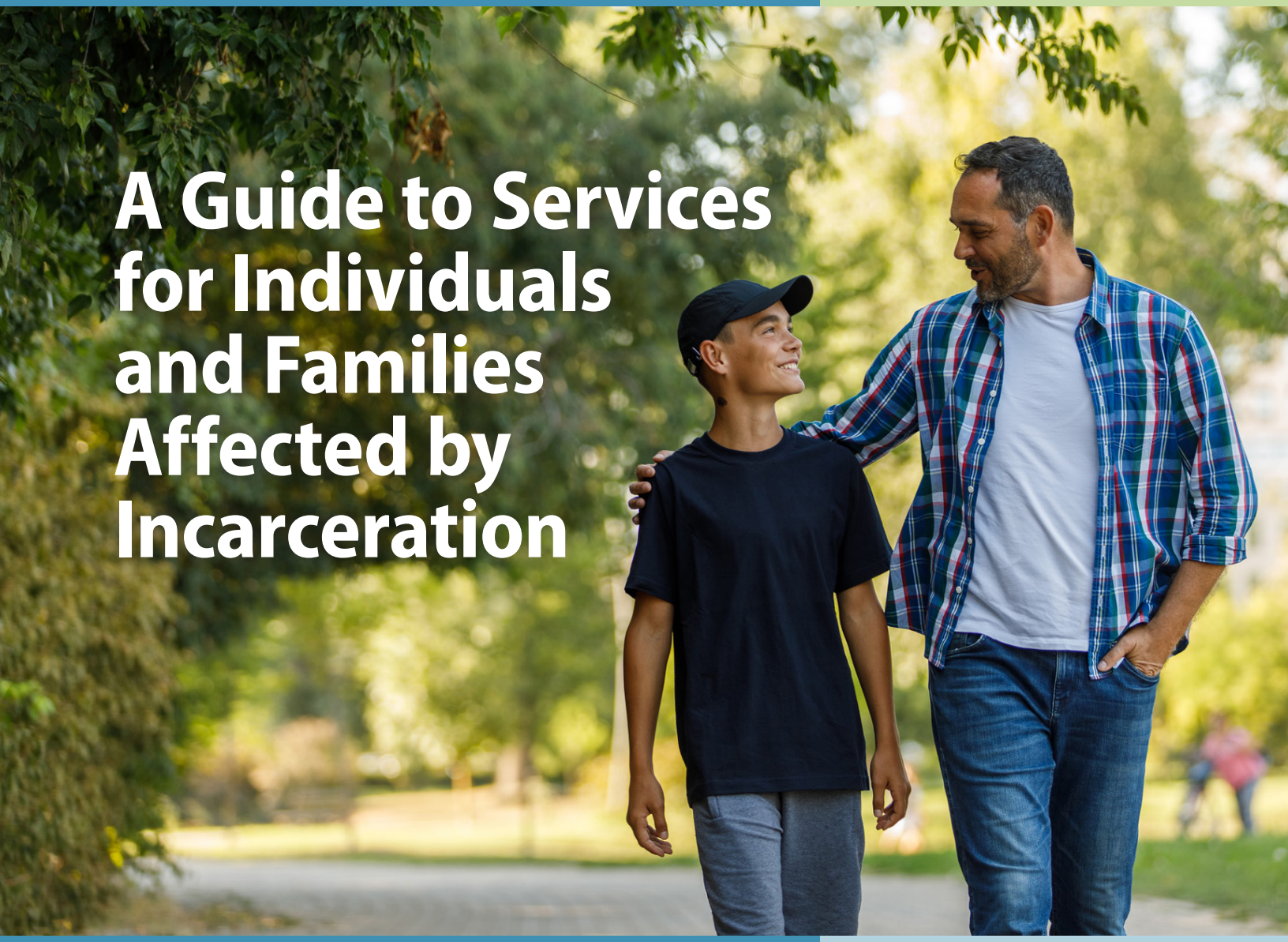
A Guide to Services for Individuals and Families Affected by Incarceration



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Introduction

Returning to the community after a period of incarceration can be difficult. Additionally, it can be hard for families who have a family member in prison, jail or detention to handle finances, care for their children, and keep the family safe and healthy. Children with parents who are incarcerated or otherwise detained need support, as do their caretakers. And returning to the community after incarceration or detention can also be challenging for everyone involved.

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services partners with people to access support, care and resources under current WA state laws. We provide:

- Programming, such as food, cash and medical assistance.
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Long-term care.
- Behavioral health treatment.
- Developmental disability services that could be helpful during transition.

This guide can help you learn how to access and apply for DSHS services. It also includes information about other agencies and partners.

DSHS Services Overview

DSHS is made up of several administrations, which you can explore at dshs.wa.gov. In this section, we highlight services that can be useful to people and families impacted by incarceration or detention in Washington state.

The Economic Services Administration helps people with low incomes meet their basic needs through cash grants, food and medical assistance as well as employment-focused services. Major programs include:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cash assistance and WorkFirst (Washington's Welfare to Work program).
- Basic Food assistance (Washington's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).
- Aged, Blind or Disabled cash assistance.
- Pregnant Women's Assistance.
- Refugee Cash Assistance.
- Medical assistance.
- Child support.
- Disability determination.

The Home and Community Living Administration provides long-term services and supports serving older adults and people with disabilities. Learn more at dshs.wa.gov/altsa.

The Behavioral Health and Habilitation Administration offers 24/7 care for people who receive residential habilitation and behavioral health services in state-operated facilities and homes throughout Washington. In addition, BHHA's Office of Forensic Mental Health Services oversees the state's adult forensic mental health system. That includes competency evaluation and restoration for people in jail as well as behavioral health information support and training for jails. Learn more at dshs.wa.gov/bha.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provides individualized vocational rehabilitation counseling, employment services and supports to people with disabilities who face barriers in finding meaningful and sustained employment. Learn more at dshs.wa.gov/dvr.

The DSHS Office of Indian Policy works with tribes on a government-to-government basis to support the development and maintenance of services for tribal communities. Learn more at dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/indian-policy.

You can explore more DSHS administrations and services at dshs.wa.gov.

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DSHS Emergency Programs

You can find more information at dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/emergency-resources.

DSHS provides emergency support to qualifying families and individuals facing:

- Eviction
- Lack of food
- Homelessness
- Pregnancy medical issues
- Utility shut off
- Domestic violence
- Medical emergency
- Nonreceipt of benefits
- Lack of child care
- Circumstances that present harm to the client or others

Applying for Benefits

The fastest way to apply for cash, child care, food, medical, and treatment programs is online at washingontconnection.org. You can also visit us in person at one of our offices (dshs.wa.gov/office-locations) or call the Customer Service Contact Center at 877-501-2233. To expedite your call or visit, have your name, date of birth and client ID ready (if you have one).

You can also find the printable DSHS benefits application online at dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/forms (form number 14-001). If you need to share information from your DSHS case file with another person, you'll need to fill out and sign an Authorization to Disclose Records form. You can download the form at dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/forms (form number 14-012).

There are many federal and state rules that affect whether DSHS can provide services to a person or a family. Our team will work with you to find out if you are eligible for services.

If you or a family member needs interpretation or translation services, our local Community Services Offices can help at no cost to you. More information is also available at dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/eligibility-language-services. Free services to assist people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have blindness are also available. Please visit dshs.wa.gov/altsa/odhh/telecommunication-relay-services or call 7-1-1 or 800-833-6384 to learn more.

Once you start receiving benefits, you can track them online at MyWABenefits.wa.gov.

Issues with Services

If you've encountered an issue applying for or receiving DSHS services, please visit our Community Relations Office webpage at dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/community-relations to fill out a Customer Complaint Form.

Requesting Public Records

Visit dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/how-request-public-records to learn about public records requests.

Child Care

How Can I Get Help With Child Care Bills?

The Department of Children, Youth and Families provides the Working Connections Child Care program. It can help pay for child care. To apply for WCCC, call 800-446-1114, visit your local Community Services Office or apply online at washingtonconnection.org/home.

How Can I Find Child Care?

Child Care Aware of Washington can help you find child care in your area and resources to help you navigate the child care system. Call 800-446-1114 or visit childcareawarewa.org to learn more.

Food

How Can I Get Help to Buy Food?

Basic Food is Washington's food assistance program. It includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Food Assistance Program. This program provides food benefits to low-income households to supplement their grocery budget. Washington state residents who meet income, resource, and citizenship or immigrant status requirements are eligible.

You can apply for Basic Food:

- At your local Community Services Office
- Online at washingtonconnection.org
- By calling 877-501-2233
- By mailing:
  DSHS Customer Service Contact Center
  P.O. Box 11699
  Tacoma, WA 98411-6699
- Or by faxing at 888-338-7410

Other Food Resources

- **Help Me Grow:** Apply for food and health insurance programs like Food Assistance, Children's Medicaid (the medical coupon), Pregnancy Medical, Basic Health Insurance and WIC at helpmegrowwa.org or call 800-322-2588.
- **Washington Information Network 211:** Access a database of more than 6,000 Washington state health and human service providers to help meet your needs. Visit win211.org, dial 2-1-1 from anywhere in Washington or call 877-211-WASH (9274).
- **Parent Trust for Washington:** This free, live telephone service offers support and resource referrals in English and Spanish to families in crisis. Support includes coaching, information and classes. Call 800-932-HOPE (4673) or visit parenttrust.org/for-families.
- **Within Reach:** Connects families to essential health resources through four statewide hotlines and ParentHelp123.org. This interactive website helps families find and apply for programs and local services. Visit withinreachwa.org or call 800-322-2588 (Family Health hotline) or 888-4FOODWA (888-436-6392) (Family Food hotline).
- **Washington PAVE:** Provides support, training, information and resources to empower and give voice to individuals, youth and families impacted by disabilities in Washington. Visit wapave.org or call 800-5-PARENT (800-572-7368).

Medical

How Can I Get Help With Medical Assistance?

DSHS can help connect you to medical assistance through several programs. You can apply for most of the below supports at a DSHS Community Services Office or online at washingtonconnection.org. You can also request applications by calling 877-501-2233.

Children's Medical program: For children living in Washington state, 18 years of age or younger.

Apple Health for Kids: Provides free medical coverage for children in families at or below 215% of the federal poverty level. (In 2025, that's $4,775 per month for a family of three.) Families with incomes above that level might be eligible for the same coverage at low cost. For more information, please visit hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/i-need-medical-dental-or-vision-care/children or call the Washington State Health Care Authority at 800-562-3022.

Family Medical program: For families with dependent children younger than age 19, whose income and resources are below Temporary Assistance for Needy Families limits.

First Steps program: Provides health care, enhanced services and case management to people who are eligible for Washington Apple Health. Qualifying families might be referred by Community Services Office employees. Families who are not referred can call 800-322-2588 to get connected to the program.

Family Planning/Take Charge program: Provides birth control and family planning services. Individuals on a Medicaid program (medical coupon) are eligible for family planning. Speak with an employee in your local Community Services Office, or call the Family Planning Hotline at 800-562-3022, ext. 12533. You can also learn more at dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/family-planning-services.

Medicare Savings program: Helps low-income Medicare recipients pay for all or part of their Medicare premiums, copayments and deductibles. Speak to our employees or apply online at dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/medicare-savings-program.

Other Medical Resources

- **Washington Basic Health:** Provides health coverage to children or families in need (income limited). Call Basic Health at 800-562-3022 or visit hca.wa.gov to learn more.
- **Community Health Access program:** A telephone assistance program serving King County residents by connecting them to health insurance, health care services and other resources. CHAP services are free and confidential. Visit kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dph/health-safety/health-centers-programs-services/access-outreach-program/community-health-access-program, call 800-756-5437 or email CHAP@kingcounty.gov to learn more.

Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Mental Health Services

How Can I Get Drug and Alcohol Treatment for Myself or My Child?

Anyone interested in learning about services in their community can call the National Drug Helpline at 844-289-0879.

How Can I Find Help for a Gambling Problem?

If you or someone you know has a gambling problem, call the Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-800-522-4700.

How Can I Get Mental Health Services for Myself or My Child?

For life-threatening emergencies, please call 911.

If you or someone you know is in crisis and is considering suicide, call or text 988, Washington's 24-hour Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. You can also chat online with someone at 988lifeline.org/talk-to-someone-now/. For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, 24-hour videophone access is also available: 988lifeline.org/help-yourself/for-deaf-hard-of-hearing/.

Children and adults who are eligible for Medicaid and have severe and recurring mental illness or emotional challenges can receive ongoing care and treatment through local behavioral health organizations. You can find your local BHO and request an assessment at thewashingtoncouncil.org/our-members.

Domestic Violence and Safety Concerns

The DSHS Domestic Violence Program provides support for community-based shelters, emergency counseling and legal advocacy for children and families who have experienced domestic violence. DSHS also sets minimum standards for domestic violence perpetrator programs and certifies provider programs.

How Can I Find Help for Domestic Violence?

Anyone can call The National Domestic Violence Hotline at any time at 800-799-SAFE (Voice) or 800-787-3224 (TTY). You can also visit thehotline.org.

You can find cultural, tribal and community-specific domestic violence services by county using the Washington State Domestic Violence Information and Referral webpage at domesticviolenceinforeferral.org/domestic-violence-programs.

The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence website also offers helpful resources. Visit wscadv.org.

How Can I Find Treatment Intervention Programs for Domestic Violence?

DSHS sets standards and certifies agencies that provide intervention to perpetrators of domestic violence. To find domestic violence intervention programs certified by DSHS, visit dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/domestic-violence-intervention-treatment.

How Can I Find Out When a Perpetrator of a Violent Crime Is Released From a DSHS Facility?

The DSHS Victim/Witness Notification Program is a voluntary, confidential service for victims and witnesses of sexual assault or other violent crimes that provides notifications when the offender is released or transferred from state psychiatric facilities or the Special Commitment Center. Victims and witnesses must sign up with the program to receive notifications. You can learn more about the program or sign up by:

- Calling 800-422-1536.
- Sending postal mail to P.O. Box 45130, Olympia, WA 98504-5130.
- Visiting dshs.wa.gov/bha/office-forensic-mental-health-services/victimwitness-notification-program.

How Can I Report Child Abuse?

Call the Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families at 866-363-4276. This service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Other Domestic Violence and Safety Resources

- **The Department of Commerce's Office of Crime Victims Advocacy:** Advocates on behalf of victims to help them get services and resources. Email ocva@commerce.wa.gov, call 360-725-4000 or visit commerce.wa.gov/ocva to learn more.
- **The Department of Corrections:** DOC's Victim Services program provides notification of moves or releases of inmates and provides safety planning, victim/offender meetings (by request of victims) and service referrals. Visit doc.wa.gov/victims/ or call 800-322-2201 to learn more.
- **Address Confidentiality program:** Assists crime victims (domestic violence, violence, sexual assault, stalking and trafficking) who have relocated to avoid further abuse. It helps participants keep their home, work or school address confidential. Visit sos.wa.gov/statewide-programs/address-confidentiality-program-acp or call 800-822-1065 to learn more.
- **Crime Victims Compensation:** Helps reimburse victims for costs incurred as a result of the crime. Visit https://lni.wa.gov/claims/crime-victim-claims/apply-for-crime-victim-benefits for more information.

Employment

How Can I Access Job Services With DSHS?

If you're interested in working at DSHS, you can find employment opportunities online at dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/human-resources-division.

If you need help finding a job, DSHS has several programs that may help, such as Basic Food, Employment, and Training. To learn more, contact your local Community Services Office, apply online at washingtonconnection.org or call 877-501-2233.

I Have a Disability and Want to Work. How Can I Get Assistance?

The DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provides employment-related services for youth and adults with disabilities who want to work and need assistance. Call 800-637-5627 or visit dshs.wa.gov/dvr for more information.

Other Employment Resources

The Employment Security Department: Assists people in obtaining employment. Visit esd.wa.gov to learn more and find additional organizations that provide employment support for people who were previously incarcerated.

Family and Caring for Children

The DSHS Community Services Division can assist you with getting:

- Financial support for children in your care through Child-Only TANF grants as well as child medical coverage.
- Emergency funds for costs related to the care of a relative child.
- Child care assistance.
- Referrals to legal supports and free and reduced cost food.

Relative caregivers can also request help from the DSHS Division of Child Support to get child support for children in their care, instead of requesting a TANF grant.

If the child in your care has a developmental disability, the DSHS Developmental Disabilities Administration provides services to help. Visit dshs.wa.gov to learn more.

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families offers an array of services for families and children, including:

- Family Reconciliation Services to resolve crisis situations and stabilize families.
- Kinship Caregivers Support for relatives caring for the child of an incarcerated parent.
- Reunification support to help ensure incarcerated parents can stay connected with their child during incarceration.
- Support for becoming a foster parent.
- Information about Juvenile Rehabilitation.
- Early Support for Infants and Toddlers to support children, birth to age 3, with developmental concerns.

Find more information at dcyf.wa.gov.

How Can I Help My Child Maintain Contact or Visit a Parent in Prison or Jail?

According to research cited by Casey Family Programs, unless safety concerns prohibit contact, it is often beneficial for children and parents to maintain contact and visit during the period of the parent's incarceration. (See: Prison Visit Strategies – Casey Family Programs). The following resources are available to support visitation or contact:

- **The Department of Corrections Friends and Family program:** Plans family events and activities at DOC facilities. Find the DOC guide for families online at doc.wa.gov/docs/publications/500-HA002.pdf.
- DOC also provides family services for relatives under community supervision. Call the family services specialist in the region where your family member is under correctional supervision: doc.wa.gov/family-support/contact-family-services#regional-liaisons.
- **Assisting Families of Inmates:** Helps prevents the breakdown of relationships among inmates and their families by providing support and education services for successful visitation. AFOI also helps prepare families for a successful transition after release. Visit afoi.org or call 804-643-2401 to learn more.

Contact the facility or visit its website for more information on how to arrange contact. Each facility has different visitation procedures.

If you are working with child welfare, contact the child's case worker to ensure that they have the information necessary to arrange visitation.

What Mentorship and Support Activities Exist for Children With an Incarcerated Parent?

According to the UpCenter, mentors can significantly help children adjust to their situation, process their feelings, and provide a supportive and trusted adult to help them make good decisions. (See: The Power of Mentorship and Its Importance for Children). The following mentoring programs work with children of incarcerated parents:

- **Big Brothers, Big Sisters/Mentoring Children of Promise:** Provides a Children of Incarcerated Parents mentoring program. Call 813-720-8778 or visit www.bbbs.org to learn more.
- **Girl Scouts Beyond Bars:** A program for daughters of incarcerated mothers. Activities are designed to build self-esteem and life skills. Includes monthly meetings planned by moms, held at Washington State Corrections Center. Visit girlscoutsww.org, email customercare@girlscoutsww.org or call 800-541-9852 to learn more.
- **Powerful Voices:** A Seattle-based organization providing mentoring to young women in juvenile justice facilities, including young mothers. Call 206-860-1026, email info@powerfulvoices.org or visit powerfulvoices.org to learn more.
- **Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents:** A Walla Walla-based organization providing mentoring to children of incarcerated parents. Visit wallawallafriends.org or call 509-527-4745 to learn more.

How Do I Work With Schools and Child Care Programs to Help Support My Child?

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has a project to help address the needs of children of incarcerated parents in the school systems. To learn more about the project, call 360-972-0648 or visit ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/children-and-families-incarcerated-parents.

My Child's Parent Is a Veteran. How Can Veterans Affairs Help Us?

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs has a program in some parts of the state to work with incarcerated parents who are veterans. They also have a project to help children of incarcerated veterans get trauma-related counseling. Dial 988 and follow the prompts to get in touch with the Veterans Affairs Crisis Hotline and learn about the project.

Children might also be eligible for additional benefits, depending on the discharge status of the veteran. Visit dva.wa.gov/veterans-service-members-and-their-families or call 800-562-2308 to learn more.

Resources for Native American and Alaskan Native Families

If you or the child in your care are Native American, services might be available to your family through Tribes or Urban Indian Organizations in Washington state. Visit Washington's tribal directory at goia.wa.gov/tribal-directory and contact your Tribe or local tribal social service agency to learn more.

Other Resources

- **The United Indians of All Tribes Foundation:** Offers head start and early head start, family social services, counseling, and cultural programs for children and families. Visit unitedindians.org or call 206-285-4425 to learn more.
- **The Seattle Indian Health Board:** Offers medical and dental care, counseling, treatment, and other services to children and adults. SIHB accepts medical coupons and Indian Health Services medical coverage. Visit sihb.org or call 206-324-9360 to learn more.
- **The N.A.T.I.V.E. Project in Spokane:** Offers family support services, counseling, treatment and cultural connections to children and families. Visit nativeproject.org or call 509-483-7535 to learn more.
- **Indian Health Service:** Find clinics in your area by visiting ihs.gov/findhealthcare.
- **American Indian Community Center:** Provides resources on a variety of services, including employment, training, career counseling, education assistance, crisis intervention, family services, alcohol and drug assessments, and more. Visit aiccinc.org or call 509-535-0886 to learn more.

Key Phone Numbers

If you do not have internet access, here are key phone numbers to call for more information about services:

- **Community Service Division:** For questions or concerns regarding cash, food, child care, medical assistance programs or WorkFirst, call 877-501-2233.
- **DSHS Division of Child Support:** For questions regarding child support issues, call 800-442-KIDS (5437). Please have the DCS case number or Social Security numbers and names of both parents available if possible.
- **DCYF Constituent Relations:** 800-723-4831.

Contact

If you have questions or comments about this guide, please contact Service Alignment Administrator Max Gibbs-Ruby at Max.Gibbs-Ruby1@dshs.wa.gov or Max.Gibbsruby@doc1.wa.gov.

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Department of Social
and Health Services