

# Welfare Fraud Faqs

## What is welfare fraud?

Simply put, welfare fraud occurs when an individual uses fraudulent means to receive public assistance benefits to which they were not entitled.

The legal citation for welfare fraud can be found at 62 P.S. §481 and states that welfare fraud occurs when an individual:

- Willfully makes a false statement or misrepresentation about their circumstances or fails to disclose a material fact regarding their eligibility status;
- Secures or attempts to secure public assistance or aids or abets another person receiving public assistance; and
- Has knowledge of the fraudulent act.

## What are the penalties for welfare fraud?

If found guilty of committing welfare fraud, a defendant must make full restitution of the overpaid benefits, can receive a sentence that can include community service, probation or incarceration, pay costs and fines to the court, and be disqualified for a period of time from public assistance benefits.

## What are the disqualification penalties for welfare fraud?

There are disqualification penalties in the Cash Assistance, Subsidized Child Care, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs. The length of a disqualification for welfare fraud depends upon the program and the offense number (see chart below). Additionally, the disqualification from benefits for a welfare fraud conviction only applies to the individual convicted of welfare fraud. Any other remaining family

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members will not be disqualified from receiving public assistance benefits.

<b>Disqualifications by Program</b>			
<b>Offense</b>	<b>Cash Assistance</b>	<b>Subsidized Child Care</b>	<b>SNAP</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Offense</b>	6 months	6 months	12 months
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Offense</b>	12 months	12 months	24 months
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Offense</b>	permanent	permanent	permanent

### **How do I report suspected welfare fraud?**

- Individuals who want to report welfare fraud can use one of three methods:
- Make an online complaint using the “Report Fraud” section of the OISG’s website
- Call the OSIG’s toll free welfare fraud tipline at 1-800-932-0582.
- Submit a complaint via U.S. Mail to the OSIG at:  
Office of State Inspector General  
555 Walnut Street, 7th Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17101

### **Does the Office of State Inspector General accept anonymous complaints?**

Yes. However, you are encouraged to identify yourself so that we may follow up with you, if necessary, to obtain additional information that would aid in our investigation.

### **What happens after I file my complaint?**

Each complaint the OSIG receives is assigned for review and possible investigation. If the complaint is outside of the OSIG’s jurisdiction, a referral will be made to the appropriate agency.

### **How long does it take to complete an investigation?**

We often receive inquiries about how long an investigation will last. Unfortunately, it is impossible for us to predict the length of an investigation. The time

period is determined by the nature of the allegations, the number of interviews that need to be completed, and the number of investigations already opened in the office.

**Will someone contact me from the Office of State Inspector General regarding my complaint?**

You may be contacted by OSIG investigative staff obtain additional information that would aid in our investigation, however, you will not be contacted at the end of the investigation to inform you of our findings.

**Are OSIG investigators law enforcement?**

Yes. The OSIG has been designated a Criminal Justice Agency by the Office of Attorney General. OSIG agents file police criminal complaints when charging those public benefit crimes under the OSIG's jurisdiction.

**Does the OSIG determine eligibility for public assistance benefits?**

No. During the OSIG's Field Investigation process, investigators will gather information to assist the caseworkers for the Department of Human Services (DHS) in making a determination of eligibility. However, the OSIG does not make the final determination of whether or not someone is eligible for public assistance benefits.