



Federal CARES Act Provides Welcome Relief for Many People in Maine

Now State Must Step Up to Fill in the Gaps

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (or CARES Act) became law on March 27th. This \$2 Trillion-dollar package includes money to:

- Put badly needed direct payments in the pockets of low- and middle-income families. These payments are called “recovery rebates.”
- Make thousands of low wage workers previously shut out from the unemployment insurance system eligible for benefits.
- Give Maine over \$1 billion dollars to address the need and fallout from this massive public health crisis.

This moment has shown us how connected we are. It has also highlighted deep economic and racial inequity in our systems and structures. Our government’s response must explicitly address the ways both people of color and people with low incomes are struggling *and* make changes to systems designed to support them through this crisis and beyond.

It will be up to the State of Maine and Governor Mills to direct these stimulus funds to people and families that will be hardest hit by this pandemic. More work needs to be done to address urgent health care, food and housing needs, including:

- Relief to Maine’s immigrant families. For a large set of tax-paying immigrant households, *no funds* were provided in this bill. Parsing immigration status during a pandemic and economic crisis is a mistake on both humanitarian and economic grounds.
- Funds for the more than 100,000 Mainers without health insurance in the midst of this crisis.
- More support for low-income families receiving food assistance (SNAP).
- Funds for additional rental housing vouchers. There were over 20,000 low-income Mainers on waiting lists for help with housing *before* this crisis.

As Congress and the State of Maine considers next steps, they must do so with a vision for the fundamental and enduring reforms that are needed to protect the health and well-being of all Americans. We are all in this together.

“Economic Impact” or “Stimulus” Payment

The CARES Act will provide many Mainers with financial assistance through a one-time individual cash payment called an “economic impact payment.” Some people are calling this a “recovery rebate”, or a “stimulus payment.”

Who is eligible?

To receive this payment:

1. Your adjusted gross income must be less than \$99,000 if you are single or \$198,000 if you are a married couple.
2. You and everyone in your family must have social security numbers or an Adoption Taxpayer Identification Number (ATIN). (There are some exceptions for members of the military.) Unfortunately, this means many immigrant families (even those who file taxes), are not eligible for these rebates. See Rebate Recovery for Immigrants on page 7 below to learn more about immigrant eligibility.
3. You cannot be claimed as a dependent on someone else’s tax returns.

What do I have to do to get an economic impact payment?

In order to receive this payment *automatically*, you must have:

- Filed taxes in either 2018 or 2019. If you filed a tax return, the IRS will automatically send you a payment. You will get it either by direct deposit (if that’s the method you used for your tax refund), or a paper check. Payments will be calculated based on 2019 federal tax returns. If you haven’t yet filed your 2019 return, payments will be based on your 2018 returns; **OR**
- Received Social Security retirement, survivors, or Social Security Disability Insurance benefits. Even if you haven’t filed taxes, the IRS will pull information to calculate your payment amount from a 2019 Form SSA-1099, Social Security Benefit Statement; **OR**
- Received Railroad Retirement benefits. Even if you haven’t filed taxes, the IRS will pull information to calculate your payment amount from a 2019 Form RRB-1099, Social Security Equivalent Benefit Statement.; **OR**
- Received Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The IRS recently announced that SSI recipients will automatically receive their economic impact payment, even if they haven’t filed taxes; **OR**
- Received Veterans Compensation and Pension (C&P) benefit payments. The IRS recently announced that Veterans Benefits recipients will automatically receive their economic impact payment, even if they haven’t filed taxes.

Automatic payments for Social Security, Railroad Retirement, SSI, and Veterans Benefits recipients will only be made for the individual recipient (\$1,200 per person). Benefit recipients with dependent children who did not file taxes and missed the deadline to provide information about their dependents to get an additional \$500 per qualifying child should be sure to file taxes in 2021 to receive this payment

No 2018 or 2019 tax return? No Social Security, Railroad Retirement, SSI, or Veterans benefits? *You need to take action now to get the check you are eligible for!*

The best way to ensure you get the money you're owed is to provide your information to the IRS as soon as possible either by:

- Filing a 2019 tax return even if you are not required to. If you choose this option, be sure to file for other tax credits you may be eligible for, such as the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the state EITC, and the state Property Tax and Sales Tax Fairness Credits; OR
- Through the IRS' new "[Non-Filers: Enter Payment Info](#)" tool, a simple way for non-filers to receive their rebate check. Click on [this link](#) to file to request your payment now. Social Security, Railroad Retirement, and SSI recipients who will automatically receive a payment for themselves will need to use this tool to receive additional payments for any eligible dependents.

You will need to take action, even if you don't owe taxes and aren't required by law to file taxes by law. The longer you wait to file, the longer you will wait to get your stimulus payment. There is more information below on where to get help filing.

NOTE: If you file a federal and state tax return, you may be eligible for and receive additional refunds, such as the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), or the Property Tax and Sales Tax fairness credits (extra help that you may need). If you use the IRS' Economic Impact Payment tool, you will only receive your economic impact payment.

For help or questions about your eligibility for the Economic Impact Payment and what you need to do to receive it, contact the [CA\\$H Maine partner in your region](#). If you don't see your region listed, you may call any of the numbers on the [list](#), which is being updated.

How much will I get?

The amount you get will vary based on your 2018 or 2019 income, your tax filing status, and the number of children you have. Most adults will receive \$1,200 each (but some will receive less). Families will receive an additional \$500 for every qualifying child 16 years old or younger.

Eligibility for the full \$1,200 follows these limits:

- Single adults who have an "adjusted gross income" of \$75,000 or less will get the full amount of \$1,200.
- Married couples with no children earning \$150,000 or less will receive a total of \$2,400. And taxpayers filing as head of household will get \$1,200 if they earned \$112,500 or less.
- If you make more than these amounts, your payment will gradually go down the more money you make, until it stops altogether for single people earning \$99,000 or married people who have no children and earn \$198,000.

You can use [this online calculator](#) to help estimate how much you are likely to receive.

Where do I find my adjusted gross income?

If you file taxes, look at or the number on line 7 of your 2018 1040 form (or 8b of your 2019 1040).

Where can I get help filing my taxes to get a “Recovery Rebate”?

You can file your taxes for free, online and from home with [IRS’s Free file program](#) or at www.myfreetaxes.com. The IRS is not currently processing paper returns. You must claim at least \$1 in income in order to file a tax return.

You can also file your federal and state taxes with an IRS certified volunteer tax preparer at no cost through CA\$H Maine if your income is below \$56,000.

- Anyone who wants to file for 2019 or 2018 to get their Economic Impact payment and can file online, can do so with help from an IRS certified volunteer tax preparer. Tax filers with simple federal and Maine returns and household incomes of \$56,000 or less will be provided a link to the CA\$H Maine tax filing program and contact information for a tax preparer to answer questions. The taxpayer enters their own information. Call 207-778-7954 to get started.
- While all CA\$H Maine tax sites have suspended in-person services until further notice, many CA\$H Maine tax sites will be reopening for tax preparation when able to. Anyone who wants to wait to meet with someone in person to have their tax return prepared should keep checking cashmaine.org for updates and more information. You must claim at least \$1 in income in order to file a tax return.

What if I can’t file right away?

The IRS has extended the deadline to file and pay federal taxes to July 15, 2020. If you file within that window, we understand you will receive your rebate check this year. If you are unable to file within that window, we understand you can still receive your rebate in 2021 when you file your 2020 tax return.

If you aren’t required to file federal taxes, we understand that these economic impact payments will be available throughout the rest of 2020 (meaning you could still file after the July 15 deadline). If you miss this window, we understand you can still receive your rebate in 2021.

When will I get the money?

The Administration plans to try and get the “recovery rebate” direct deposited on April 17 for people who have filed taxes. You will only receive your money by direct deposit if this is how you received a tax refund in 2018 or 2019. If you received your tax return through a paper check, you will receive this refund as a check. If this is the case, you will likely have to wait longer to receive it.

It is estimated that Social Security and Railroad Retirement beneficiaries receiving automatic payments will receive them by the end of April, while SSI recipients will receive their automatic payments by early May. Stimulus payments for Social Security, Railroad Retirement, and SSI recipients will be made in the same way recipients currently receive these benefits. (For example, if you usually receive your monthly SSI payment through direct deposit, your stimulus payment will also be direct deposited.)

The IRS has developed a web-based portal, "[Filers: Get Your Payment.](#)" [where you can check your payment status.](#)

What if I don't have a bank account?

If you don't have a bank account, a paper check will be sent to the address listed on your tax return. Direct deposit is the quickest and safest way to get payments. Alternatives to receiving a paper check are opening a bank account or using a prepaid debit card. Once you get a prepaid debit card, you may need to contact the company directly to find the account and routing numbers needed for direct deposit (not the number printed on the card). You can also use [CashApp](#).

What if I don't have an address?

Shelters and other service providers, such as health care clinics and drop-in day centers or other agencies that offer homeless prevention services may allow you to use their address for tax purposes. If you are not staying in a shelter or cannot find a service provider nearby, you can also use a trusted relative's or friend's address. The IRS will deliver checks to P.O. boxes.

I received my 2018 or 2019 tax refund through a tax preparer prepaid card or through a tax refund anticipation check (RAC) or tax refund anticipation loan (RAL). How will I get my stimulus payment?

The IRS indicated that they did not plan to send direct deposits through the temporary pass-through accounts that are set up for RACs or RALs, and instead, would try to identify the taxpayer's actual bank account information and send the payment there, or send a paper check to the taxpayer.

News reports, however, indicate that some payments have been inadvertently sent to temporary RAL/RAC accounts. Some tax preparers/RAL lenders are returning those payments to the IRS, which will send paper checks to individuals. Others are either forwarding the money to the taxpayer's account or sending them a paper check.

Taxpayers who think their payment was sent to a temporary RAL/RAC account should check the [Get My Payment](#) portal and try to provide their bank account information if they can. The IRS is also aware that people may have discarded tax preparer prepaid cards after they cashed out the card. We understand that the IRS does not plan to deposit funds to those cards and instead plans to send paper checks, although this could change.

Will this count against my other benefits?

The Recovery Rebate will not count as income or resources for 12 months for means tested programs. We will update this information immediately if there is any change. Stimulus payments will not be taxable. Receiving a rebate will not interfere with your eligibility for:

- SSI;
- SNAP;
- TANF;
- Medicaid;
- Medicare;
- SSDI, DWB, CDB, SSA Retirement;
- Affordable Care Act premium credits;
- Housing assistance; or
- Other income-related federal programs.

Your stimulus payment cannot be counted towards available resources for General Assistance (GA).

For more information on COVID-19 and social insurance and benefit programs, we have posted [a guide from Cornell University on our website](#).

I owe money to the IRS. Will I still get a check?

The government will not be intercepting rebate checks to collect certain unpaid debts, including debts owed to a federal agency, past-due state income taxes, federal taxes, unemployment compensation debts, or past due student loan payments through July 15. As far as we know, the government *will only* continue to collect child support debt by intercepting rebate checks.

Other Debts You May Owe:

- **Court Judgments:** If there is a court judgment saying that you owe someone else money you cannot be forced to use any part of your recovery rebate to pay this debt. The only exception to this would be if the judgment is to collect past due child support that you owe.
- **Automatic Withdrawals from your Bank Account:** If you have already entered into an agreement with your Bank to automatically take money out of your bank account the bank can continue to take that money from your bank account, including that part of the money in your account that comes from a recovery rebate. Examples of such debts could include auto loans, payday loans, or any other previously agreed-to automatic withdrawal established on your account. If you want to avoid having your stimulus check used for these debts, reach out to your lender and bank right away to ask about different payment options or forbearance.

- If you are being contacted by a debt collector or anyone else to whom you owe money, you cannot be forced to pay any part of the recovery rebate to pay off that debt.

What if I (or my dependent) qualify for a rebate in 2018/2019, but don't qualify or qualify for less in 2020? Will I have to pay the money back to the IRS?

If you get a check that is larger because your 2018/2019 taxes had different income or because of a change in dependents between then and now, you will not owe that money back to the IRS. While the stimulus payment is technically a tax credit for tax year 2020, it is an advance credit based on your information for 2018 or 2019. For example, if your income is too high this year to qualify, but your 2018 or 2019 income was within the threshold and you received a payment, you would not be expected to repay that money to the IRS.

On the other hand, you could get an additional payment when you file your 2020 taxes, if you received less based on your 2018 or 2019 taxes. For example, if you had a child in 2020, but your refund was based on your 2018 or 2019 tax returns, and you therefore didn't receive an extra \$500 for that child, you could receive that additional payment when you file your 2020 taxes.

Will the IRS contact me about my Payment?

The IRS will *not* call, email, or text you about your Payment. The IRS will not contact you to request personal or bank account information. Watch out for websites and social media attempts that request money or personal information and for scams tied to Economic Impact Payments.

A letter about the Payment will be mailed to each recipient's last known address within 15 days after the Payment is made. The letter will provide information on how the Payment was made and how to report any failure to receive the Payment.

Rebate Recovery for Immigrants:

If you are not a citizen, you are eligible to receive a rebate check if you have

- A social security number (Note: If you are married filing jointly, both spouses must have social security numbers (one for military). If a child has an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), you won't get the additional payment for them, but you can still get the main payment.);
- Your income is less than \$99,000 if you are single or \$198,000 if you are a married couple;
- You are not claimed as a dependent.

AND you either:

- Have a green card; or
- Have been physically present in the U.S. for at least 31 days in 2020, at least 6 months in 2019, and at least 2 months in 2018.

You can *receive* your check automatically if:

- You have filed taxes for 2018 or 2019

OR:

You are someone who receives Social Security, Railroad Retirement, SSI, or Veterans Benefits. **If you have not filed taxes and you don't get Social Security, Railroad Retirement, SSI, or Veterans Benefits, you can act now and still receive your rebate check by using the [IRS' non-filers tool](#).** If you were a "resident alien" in 2019 because you satisfied the "[substantial presence test](#)" and qualify for the Payment, you must file a tax return to receive the Payment (you cannot use the non-filers tool). **NOTE ON PUBLIC CHARGE TEST:** Federal stimulus checks will NOT be part of a public charge decision. Your stimulus check is a tax credit so the public charge test DOES NOT apply to this money.

Unemployment Insurance

The CARES Act will get unemployment benefits to thousands of workers not eligible in the past. This new law will also increase payments for everyone getting benefits. It will also extend the number of weeks they can get help.

IMPORTANT NOTE: These new benefits will be available soon. But, they are not yet available. Do not file for them yet or you will be denied. Wait until the Maine Department of Labor says that these benefits are available. They will put a notice on their website. We will give notice on our website, too.

You still should make sure to file for benefits each week. Once they are in place you will get back benefits for the weeks you would have been eligible for under the new law. Check in with The Department of Labor for updates on when the new benefit will be available.

If you are *currently* receiving benefits you should continue to file your weekly claim. You will get additional benefits once the new law is in place.

Here is a short summary of the new unemployment parts in the law:

New Groups of Workers Eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA):

IMPORTANT NOTE: This new law *dramatically* expands benefits to unemployed workers who are impacted by the Coronavirus. You may be eligible; the best way to find out is to apply.

Workers that have been shut out of the unemployment system for years can now get benefits. Under this new program, benefits will be available to:

- self-employed workers,
- “gig” workers,
- independent contractors, and
- workers that haven’t worked long enough to get regular UI benefits.

Immigrants with a work permit or social security number may be eligible for PUA.

People who are working at home but still getting paid are not eligible. People receiving paid sick leave or other paid leave benefits are also not eligible.

Qualifying for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance: To qualify you must *self-attest* (this means that you swear what you’ve said is true) that:

- You are able to work, but partially or totally unemployed; *OR*
- You can’t work for any one of these reasons:
 - You have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have symptoms of it and are seeking diagnosis;
 - A member of their household has been diagnosed with COVID-19;
 - You are providing care for someone diagnosed with COVID-19;
 - You are providing care for a child or other household member who can’t attend school or work because it is closed due to COVID-19;
 - You are quarantined or have been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine;
 - You were scheduled to start employment and do not have a job or cannot reach their place of employment as a result of a COVID-19 outbreak;
 - You have become the breadwinner for a household because the head of household has died as a direct result of COVID-19;
 - You had to quit their job as a direct result of COVID-19;
 - Your place of employment is closed as a direct result of COVID-19; or
 - You meet other criteria that will soon be established by the Secretary of Labor.

What do I get with Pandemic Unemployment Assistance?

PUA provides up to 39 weeks of benefits. These benefits are available through December 31, 2020 (unless extended). Workers who qualify for PUA will get their regular benefits AND will also qualify for the additional benefits of \$600 a week discussed below.

You may be able to get back benefits to the week ending February 8, 2020 if you met one of the reasons above in that time.

Additional Benefits for all Unemployment Claimants:

Extra Payments: All regular UI and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance claimants will get a boost in weekly benefits. For the next 4 months, until July 31, 2020, once you are getting benefits, you will get both your regular benefits *and* an additional \$600 a

week. For example, if your regular benefits are \$300 a week, you can now get \$900 a week.

How will this additional unemployment impact other benefits?

This additional \$600 emergency benefit increase will not be counted as income for MaineCare or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP or Cub Care).

Your *regular* UI or PUA benefits will still be counted as income.

Extra weeks of payments: Maine currently offers up to 26 weeks of benefits under its regular UI program. This new law adds an *additional* 13 weeks of benefits to workers who run out of regular benefits.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

The federal CARES Act provides \$900 Million dollars nationally to increase funding for LIHEAP. This funding supports immediate home energy assistance for low-income households affected by coronavirus.

LIHEAP, also known as 'HEAP' or 'fuel assistance' in Maine, helps both homeowners and renters with their heating costs. The amount of help you may get from HEAP is based on your household size, income, and energy costs. If heat is included in your rent, you may still get help.

To be eligible, you must meet [HEAP income guidelines](#). For example, a household of two people must have income lower than \$2,900/month and for a household of three, it must be lower than \$3,582/month. If your household income is over the income guidelines, you may be able to deduct a portion of your income under certain circumstances.

You can apply for through one of the [Community Action Programs](#), depending on where you live. You need to bring proof of identity (such as a license, state ID, passport, etc.), income, social security numbers, and your address. You can use a utility bill to prove your address.

Student Loan Relief

There is help for people with Federally Guaranteed Student Loans. Between now and September 30, 2020:

- You will not have to make any payments on these loans
- No interest will be charged on these loans
- No one can take any action to collect any money from you if you are behind in your loan payments.
- You will remain eligible for any loan forgiveness program that you are enrolled in.

The Department of Education has provided [some basic information](#) about this new law.

These protections **do not apply** to Private Student Loans.

How to Find Out If You Have a Federal Student Loan

To find out if you have a federal student loan, log in to the [National Student Loan Data System](#).

This is the U.S. Department of Education database for student aid. You can look here to find out if you have any federal student loans. This will only give you information about FEDERAL student loans, not private loans.

If you don't know whether you have private loans, check your credit report. Any private loans should show up on your report. You can get one free credit report every year. [Request your free credit report](#).

Relief for Tenants

There is help for tenants.

- If you live in a certain type of apartment your landlord can not evict you for non-payment of rent or other fees or charges until July 25, 2020.
- You also can not be charged a late payment or other penalty for not paying your rent during this time.
- After July 25, 2020 your landlord will have to serve you with a 30-day notice to vacate and then take you to court before you can be removed from your apartment.
- A list of one of the types of properties covered by this law [can be found here](#).
- A list of another type of the properties covered by this law [can be found here](#).

You should check this list to see if you are protected by this law. If you have a question you should contact Pine Tree Legal Assistance or Maine Equal Justice.