

# Assisted Prison Visits: getting help with travel costs

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## **This information sheet is only a guide to the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme.**

If you are receiving benefits or are on a low income, you may be eligible to claim help with your travel expenses when visiting someone in prison or a youth custody centre from the **Assisted Prison Visits Unit (APVU)**.

### **Am I eligible?**

You are eligible to claim if you are:

- A close relative of the person you wish to visit, i.e. **wife, husband, civil partner, mother, father, son, daughter, brother or sister, grandparent, adoptive/step/half brother/sister, step-child or step-parent or someone who acted in loco parentis for a significant period during the prisoner's childhood**, or you are their **sole visitor**, i.e. the **only** person who is visiting them. If you claim as a sole visitor, the APVU will confirm with the prison that the person has not been visited by anyone else in the four weeks prior to your visit.
- In receipt of **Income Support, Income based Job Seekers Allowance, Child Tax Credit\* Working Tax Credit\* with a disability element or Child Tax Credit\*, Pension Credit** or hold a **Health Certificate 2 or 3**. You must send in your Health Benefits Certificate or Pension Credit award notice the first time you claim.  
\*conditions apply
- A qualifying dependent of someone who is receiving any of the above benefits.

### **What if I am a prisoner's unmarried partner?**

Partners who were living with the prisoner, as a couple, in an established relationship immediately prior to imprisonment are eligible.

### **We weren't living together, but we have children together**

If this is the case, you may qualify for help by acting as an escort to the child(ren). You should send in proof that the prisoner is the parent of the child(ren) with your first application form. If the prisoner's name is on the birth certificate or an official document that confirms the child's name is the same as the prisoners', this will serve as proof. If not, the prisoner can sign an affidavit stating that they are the child's parent. A special statutory declaration form is available from the APVU. The prisoner should sign the declaration in the presence of a justice of the peace or a magistrate or a practicing solicitor or Commissioner for Oaths. Advice should be sought from the APVU.

### **How do I claim?**

The first time you claim, you will have to fill in a fairly detailed form giving information about yourself and the person you want to visit. APVU forms can be obtained from Prisoners' Families and Friends Service. They are also available at the prison, the prison visitors' centre, and direct from the APVU, phone 0121 626 2206.

You will not have to fill this form in every time you claim. APVU will send you a shorter repeat claim form with your payment to use for subsequent visits.

### **What can I claim?**

You can claim for one visit every 14 days up to a maximum of 26 a year. Claims must be made within 28 days of the date of the first visit. You can also apply for an advance payment, but you must allow at least two weeks from the date of receipt by the APVU for the claim to be processed.

In all cases you must send receipts/tickets and a confirmation of visit voucher to APVU for every visit that you make even if it is your last visit. Use the prepaid envelope that they send you (the confirmation of visit voucher is sent to you by APVU. It must be completed at the prison).

APVU will pay for travel to and from the prison by public transport or pay a mileage rate when traveling by car. They will not pay for taxis unless the fare is less than the public transport alternative or there is no public transport available.

If there is a medical reason that makes traveling difficult or you are elderly or too young to visit unaccompanied, phone the APVU for advice on what additional help may be available

If you are away from home for five hours or more, you receive a light refreshment allowance. Overnight allowances may be paid at the discretion of the APVU. It is advisable to contact them before you incur any expenditure on accommodation.

A childminding allowance may be paid if it is not appropriate for a qualifying child to visit, but the childminder must be registered with the local authority.

### **On a low income but not receiving any qualifying benefits?**

The APVU will accept a Health Benefits Certificate as proof of a low income. If you are not eligible for any of the qualifying benefits, you could still apply for one of these. You will need to complete a claim form HC1, which you can get from your doctor or pharmacy or local benefits office or from the APVU. Once you have this certificate you can send it with your claim to the APVU.

### **Further information**

If there is anything else you need to know about the scheme you can write to the APVU at:

***Assisted Prison Visits Unit  
Freepost BM2257  
PO Box 2152  
Birmingham  
B15 1BR.***

The APVU customer helpline 0845 300 1423 is usually available between 10.15 to 11.45 and 14.15 to 15.45 Monday to Friday. For general enquiries ask for Customer Services but if you have a query about a specific claim or payment ask for the caseworker who deals with the prison you are visiting.

If you have a textphone (for people with hearing difficulties) phone 0845 304 0800. Times as above

Information also available on audio cassette, in Braille, in Welsh and a range of foreign languages.

The information provided in this factsheet is intended for information purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. Prisoners' Families and Friends Service (PFFS) recommends that professional legal advice should always be sought. The information contained in this factsheet is subject to change and may not be up-to-date or accurate. PFFS gives no guarantee of the accuracy or completeness of this information. PFFS will not be held responsible for any loss or damage arising from the use of the information provided.