

Release and Resettlement: Finance

Are newly released prisoners entitled to benefits?

They are, but will need to make a claim as soon as possible when they come out. Most released prisoners will be claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), unless they are unable to work due to sickness or disability, in which case they will claim Income Support. They will need to attend an interview at their local Jobcentre Plus and complete a JSA claim form. The prison may be able to arrange for them to get the form before release, if not, they should contact their local Jobcentre themselves and ask for one to be sent to them. Those on a low income who are paying rent may be able to claim Housing Benefit. If they will be working, but their income is low and they have children or a disability they may be entitled to Working Tax Credit

Does the prison give money on release?

If they have served a sentence of 15 days or more they will receive a discharge grant, although this is a small amount. Prisoners who will be homeless on release, and who have co-operated with the probation department in the prison to try and find accommodation, should get a higher rate if they need to pay for accommodation in advance. This only applies to commercial rents, not if they are renting from a friend or family member who is not a commercial landlord.

Is the discharge grant automatic?

Prisoners should be given a form to sign for the grant about two weeks before their release date. However, it is occasionally overlooked, so if they do not get this form they should ask for it.

What about clothes to wear when they come out?

Some prisons will provide a basic set of new clothes for released prisoners, but some will just give them back the clothes they were wearing when they went in. They can apply for a Community Care Grant at the local Jobcentre Plus, but this is not automatic. They can appeal against a refusal.

Are there grants available for anything else?

If the prisoner is eligible to receive Income Support or Jobseekers Allowance on release, claims can be made up to 6 weeks in advance for grants to buy furniture, household equipment and cover connection charges and travel costs. A recently released prisoner may be able to apply for a crisis loan if their discharge grant runs out before their claim comes through. They should claim at the Jobcentre Plus office and should get a decision the same day, or the following day. If turned down, they can ask for a review of the decision. It is a loan, however, and will have to be paid back out of their benefits afterwards.

What about home leave?

Prisoners cannot claim grants for home leave, but if the person they are staying with is in receipt of benefits they may be able to claim. Claim forms are available from a Jobcentre Plus office.

Can prisoners get their National Insurance paid?

NI contributions will not be credited to people for their time in prison, unless they are acquitted or their conviction is quashed. They do have the option of paying extra contributions to bring them up to date when they start working again.

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