



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Office of Community Services | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201
www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs

Social Services Block Grant
Dear Colleague Letter

DCL#: SSBG-DCL-2022-06
DATE: April 6, 2022
TO: State and Territory Program Administrative Officials, Stakeholders,
Community-Based Partners
SUBJECT: Fraudulent Activity Related to the Social Services Block Grant
ATTACHMENT(S): N/A

Dear Colleagues,

This message is to advise of a significant effort targeting individuals, many who are eligible for services by the Office of Community Services' programs, including the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG). We seek your assistance in stopping this abuse of vulnerable members of our communities.

Reports of Fraudulent Activity

The Office of Community Services has received a notable uptick from adults who have been targeted by claims that they won a Social Services Block Grant award, yet must pay a transaction fee to receive the award. The perpetrators of this award scheme misrepresent themselves as federal agents. The targets of the fraudulent activity, in some cases, report to have paid out amounts totaling \$1000 in credit card payments or more. Most of the individuals affected have incomes that are fixed or limited. Repayment of these debts present additional hardship to a population already facing difficult circumstances.

Characteristics of the Fraudulent Outreach

Individuals victimized by this activity, or who reach the Office of Community Services in hopes to confirm their alleged winnings prior to payment, express similar circumstance that are noted below:

- Notices of winning may come to the targeted individual via e-mail via @yahoo.com, @gmail.com, @aol.com or other commercial addresses.

- The name on the e-mail account may entail an official-sounding title such as AgentJaneDoe@gmail.com.
- Notices may come via a social media message app such as Facebook Messenger – either via text or calling.
- A complementary notice appears to come from a social media friend to confirm receipt of their winnings or in some cases, refer the targeted individual to another source to begin to claim their winnings.
- Individuals are asked to purchase credit card gift cards to pay for the alleged SSBG winnings or grant transaction fee.

Key Information

The Social Services Block Grant provides needed assistance to 26 million individuals across the nation. The perpetrators of this scheme are making false claims using SSBG but have no ties to the federal program. We ask that you join us in publicizing this information to prevent additional loss.

- Share notice of the fraudulent activity among the subject matter experts at the state and local agencies who provide both indirect and direct engagement with social services clients. We encourage alerts on your public-facing websites.
- Ensure that subject matter experts in your offices who receive public phone calls or complaints are aware of this issue and can reference the resources listed to mitigate and eventually catch the perpetrators of this fraud.
- Brief local law enforcement and investigative partners on the methods by which potential SSBG clients have been targeted to enlist their resources in tracking, identifying, capturing, and prosecuting perpetrators.

Reporting Information

If a client contacts your agency or program advising that an alleged federal agent advised that they won an SSBG award, yet needed to pay a fee, please request that the client:

- Report the information to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Grants Fraud Hotline. The client should note material asked of them, any money spent, and identifying information such as the email address and phone number used by the person misrepresenting the U.S. government. The client should report this identifying information to the hotline at 1-800-447-8477.
- File a complaint with the [Federal Trade Commission](https://www.ftc.gov) online, or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261.

Steps Toward Remediation

Assure the client that the federal government does not charge fees to access services associated with the Social Services Block Grant. For additional information, please see this website by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

<https://www.hhs.gov/grants/grants/avoid-grant-scams/index.html>.

Summary

The Office of Community Services has its roots in redressing the causes and conditions that contribute to poverty. We see our work, in partnership together with states and community-based organizations, as protecting populations at risk of abuse and exploitation, including older adults, individual with disabilities, and those with limited incomes.

We regret that a grant intended for good, is being used nefariously, yet ever optimistic, we believe together, we can expose these actors and continue our work toward effective administration of supports to children, families and individuals in communities.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. OCS looks forward to continuing to provide high-quality services to OCS grantees.

/s/

Yolanda J. Butler, PhD

Lead

Social Services Block Grant

Office of Community Services