

CHAPTER 12: GETTING YOUR VITAL DOCUMENTS

Introduction: Having your vital documents is essential to your transition plan and success in adult life. If you do not have proof of who you are, it is hard to do things like get a job, save money, rent an apartment, get benefits, and travel. This chapter gives you information so you can make sure you get your vital documents before you leave care,

What are vital documents?

- A vital record is a government document containing information about a person's important life events. Examples of vital records include your original birth certificate, social security card, and state identification (ID) or driver's license.

Why do I need my vital documents?

- Vital documents are important because you need them to do most of the things that you need to do to be successful as an adult. For example, you need identification to get a job, open a bank account, apply for benefits, get an apartment, apply for a GED, and apply for college. You need identification to be able to go places you want and need to go, like entering certain building and traveling.
- Without vital documents it is very hard to prove you exist and do the things you need to do.

Should the child welfare agency make sure I have my vital documents before I leave foster care at age 18 or older?

- The law requires the child welfare agency to request these documents for you and provide them to you before you leave care at age 18 or older.
- Before the child welfare agency and the court can close your case, they must provide you the following: an official or certified copy of your birth certificate, a security card issued by the Commissioner of Social Security, health insurance information, medical records, and a driver's license or identification card issued by the state, and documentation that proves you were in foster care.¹

What should I do if I am about to be discharged from foster care and I have not received my vital documents?

- Let your lawyer know and let the judge in your case know if you do not have your vital documents and are about to be discharged from care.
- **The judge should not close your case if you do not have your vital documents and should order actions be taken so the documents are provided to you.** The judge

should keep the case open until these actions are completed and you have your documents.²

- If you do not have your vital documents, you should start asking about them at least a year before you discharge. Asking about them at your case planning and court hearings a year and then 6 months before discharge will help make sure your documents are ordered and you receive them before you leave care.

I'm 18 or older. How do I request my birth certificate on my own if I was born in Pennsylvania?

- The cost of a birth certificate is \$20. You can learn about the different ways to order your birth certificate online.³
- You can also go to a local office that processes birth certificate requests. Offices are located in Erie, Harrisburg, New Castle, Pittsburgh, Scranton, and Philadelphia. You can find their locations and hours online.⁴
- Download the birth certificate application online.⁵
- You will need Pennsylvania state government issued photo ID to request a birth certificate. If you do not have photo ID, you can present other proof of your identity and address, like pay stubs, bank statements, utility bills, and mail from a government agency or public benefits agencies. If you do not have this kind of proof, ask a caseworker or other service provider to make the request for you.

How do I request my social security card on my own?

- You need to apply for a social security card in person. There is no cost for a social security card.
- Use the Social Security Office Locator and type in your zip code to find your local office.⁶
- Complete an application in advance application and take it to your local office.⁷
- You will need to show proof of who you are, usually a form of a government issued state ID, to get a replacement social security card.

How do I get a state ID?

- The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) provides state IDs. Find a PennDOT office online.⁸ The cost of state ID is \$31.50, payable only by check or money order.
- You must go in person to a PennDOT office to fill out the application. You can print out and complete the application⁹ beforehand and bring it to the PennDOT office along with: proof that you are a U.S. citizen, your Social Security card, and, if you are over 18 years old, two proofs of your residency in Pennsylvania.¹⁰

How do I get help getting valid immigration status and documents?

See Chapter 13: Immigration.

¹ 42 U.S.C.A § 675(5)(i).

² 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(5)(i) (specifying that a child who is age 18 or older “is not discharged from care without being provided with “your birth certificate, health insurance information, and other vital documents described therein); PA.J.R.C.P. 1631(e)(2)(g) (requiring that a transition plan include “verification that all vital documents and records have been provided to the child”); PA.J.R.C.P. 1631(e)(3) (“If the court is not satisfied that the requirements of [the transition plan] have been met, a subsequent hearing shall be scheduled.”); PA.J.R.C.P. 1631(e)(4) (“The court shall not terminate its supervision of the child without approving an appropriate transition plan”)

³ *Certificate Ordering Information*, PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/certificates/Pages/Ordering.aspx>.

⁴ *Public Offices*, PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/certificates/Pages/Public-Offices.aspx>.

⁵ PA. DEP’T OF HEALTH, FORM PA. H105, *Application for a Birth Certificate* (2018), https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Certificates%20and%20Records/Application_for_a_Birth_Certificate.pdf.

⁶ *Social Security Office Locator*, SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, <https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>.

⁷ SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, FORM SS-5, *Application for a Social Security Card* (2019), <https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf>.

⁸ *Locations Info Center*, PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, <https://www.dot3e.penndot.gov/locator/locator.jsp>.

⁹ PA. DEP’T OF TRANSP., FORM DL-54A, *Application for Initial Identification Card*, <http://www.dot.state.pa.us/public/dvspubsforms/BDL/BDL%20Form/DL-54A.pdf>.

¹⁰ PA. DEP’T OF TRANSP., PUB. 195US, *Identification and Residency Requirements for U.S. Citizens*, <http://www.dot.state.pa.us/Public/DVSPubsForms/BDL/BDL%20Publications/pub%20195us.pdf>.