

JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

On October 22, 2020, the [Social Security Administration \(SSA\) revised the information available on its COVID-19 webpage](#) about who is eligible for an in-person appointment while its local offices generally remain closed to the public due to the pandemic. They divide their instructions into: 1) Those who need help with their benefits; and 2) Those who need help with a Social Security number (SSN).

For those who need help with their benefits:

Generally, SSA will schedule an in-person appointment for those “in dire need situations.” SSA defines a dire need situation as when an individual:

Is without food or shelter, including utilities, or is without medical care or coverage and needs to apply for or reinstate benefits from SSA; or
Currently receives benefits from SSA and has an urgent need for payment to meet expenses for food, shelter, or medical treatment, and the individual cannot receive a payment from SSA electronically.

For those who need help with a Social Security number:

SSA is prioritizing requests for in-person SSN services for:

Individuals age 12 or older applying for their first SSN card.
Individuals who need to update or correct their SSN information (such as their name, date of birth, or citizenship) to obtain income, resources, or medical care or coverage, or other services or benefits (for example filing a tax return, applying for housing, or seeking an Economic Impact Payment).

SSA encourages those who don't fit into one of these priority situations to request a replacement SSN card through an online my Social Security account, or

by mailing an **application for a Social Security card (Form SS-5)** to their local office, along with original documents to prove their identity, with the assurance that these documents will be mailed back to the individual.

However, SSA concedes that since there are “delays processing mail-in SSN card applications, it may take us between two and four weeks to process the application and return the evidence.” In many states, individuals will be punished if they are found to be driving without having their driver’s license on their person, and the law prohibits immigrants from having their immigration documents out of their possession. **SSA’s Program Operations Manual System (POMS)** contains this warning on the requirements for replacing an SSN card:

CAUTION: Never ask a noncitizen applicant to mail his or her immigration document to SSA. Under the law, noncitizens 18 years of age or older in the U.S. must have immigration documentation in their possession at all times. If they do not, they are subject to fine and/or imprisonment.