



Department of Human Services  
 311 West Saratoga Street  
 Baltimore MD 21201

**FIA ACTION TRANSMITTAL**

**Control Number: 19-08**

**Effective Date: January 1, 2019**

**Issuance Date: January 4, 2019**

**TO: DIRECTORS, LOCAL DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
 DEPUTY/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS FOR FAMILY INVESTMENT  
 FAMILY INVESTMENT SUPERVISORS AND ELIGIBILITY STAFF  
 HEALTH OFFICERS, LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS  
 LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT ELIGIBILITY STAFF  
 ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION DIVISION, OFFICE OF ELIGIBILITY  
 SERVICES, MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SUPERVISORS  
 AND ELIGIBILITY STAFF**

**FROM: NETSANET KIBRET, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FIA**  
**DEBBIE RUPPERT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MDH/OES**

**RE: 2019 SOCIAL SECURITY (RSDI) AND SSI COST-OF-LIVING  
 INCREASE AND RELATED INCREASES**

**PROGRAMS AFFECTED: CASH ASSISTANCE, MEDICAL ASSISTANCE  
 AND FOOD SUPPLEMENT PROGRAMS**

**ORIGINATING OFFICE: OFFICE OF PROGRAMS**

**Summary**

Recipients of Social Security Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) will receive a 2.8% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2019. Railroad Retirement and Veterans Benefits will also be adjusted by the same percent. This transmittal describes the mass change process and impact of these adjustments on cash assistance, Medical Assistance and Food Supplement Program benefits.

## Action Required

Effective January 1, 2019, Social Security (RSDI), SSI, Railroad Retirement and Veterans Benefits will increase by 2.8%. Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) need to understand and apply these changes to all affected programs according to the procedures outlined below.

NOTE: Count the increase for all cash assistance, Medical Assistance and Food Supplement cases beginning with January 2019 benefits. A mass change (CARES mass modification) on December 8, 2018 updated the RSDI, SSI, Railroad Retirement and Veterans Benefits for ongoing cases in CARES effective January 1, 2019.

### I. SSI and RSDI Benefits: Effective January 2019

Federal Living Arrangements	Amount of Increase	SSI Only (Dollars)		SSI and RSDI (Dollars)**	
		Present Benefit	New Benefit	Present Benefit	New Benefit
Individual A* and C	\$21.00	750.00	771.00	770.00	791.00
Couple A	\$32.00	1,125.00	1,157.00	1,145.00	1,177.00
Individual B	\$14.00	500.00	514.00	520.00	534.00
Couple B	\$21.34	750.34	771.34	770.00	791.34
Individual with essential person A ***	\$31.00	1,126.00	1,157.00	1,146.00	1,177.00
Couple with essential person A	\$42.00	1,489.00	1,531.00	1,509.00	1,551.00
Individual with essential person B	\$21.00	750.33	771.33	770.33	791.33
Couple with essential person B	\$28.34	1,012.02	1,040.36	1,032.02	1,060.36

\* - A - Independent living arrangement;

B - One-third reduction for living in the household of another and receiving support and maintenance from the householder;

C - Child living with parents or stepparents whose resources and income are considered in determining the countable income and resources of the child.

\*\* - The benefit in the fourth column is usually \$20 more than the benefit in the second column. The same relationship exists between the first and third columns.

\*\*\* - **Essential Person Increments:**

Living Arrangements	Increment	Present Benefit	New Benefit
A	\$10.00	\$376.00	\$386.00
B	\$7.00	\$250.33	\$257.33

For purposes of verifying new RSDI/SSI amounts for individual cases, SVES or the award letter supplied by the customer should be used at the next recertification or at interim change.

**II. PAA Assisted Living and Project Home Cases**

There is NO cost of living increase for Public Assistance to Adults (PAA) cases for 2019.

**PAA Rates and Per Diems:**

<i>PAA Rates remain the same</i>	Rate	Per Diem
Project Home Level A	<b>\$776</b>	<b>\$25.53</b>
Project Home Level B	<b>\$875</b>	<b>\$29.11</b>
Project Home Level C	<b>\$1173</b>	<b>\$38.58</b>
Project Home Level D	<b>\$1376</b>	<b>\$45.26</b>
Assisted Living	<b>\$894</b>	<b>\$29.41</b>

The personal needs allowance for all PAA cases, including Maryland Department of Health (MDH) Rehabilitative Residence cases, is still \$82.00.

Attached to this Action Transmittal are copies of letters to be sent to operators of Project Home and licensed Assisted Living facilities to explain these changes.

Please note: for Rehabilitative Residence cases, the allowable need is the cost of the Rehabilitative Residence as paid, not to exceed \$54.00 per day.

### III. Increase in Railroad Retirement Benefits

Railroad Retirement (RR) benefits will also be adjusted in the mass modification for January 2019.

### IV. Increase in Veterans Benefits

The cost-of-living increase in the VA pension program will also be 2.8% effective January 2019. Veterans Benefits will also be adjusted in the mass modification for January 2019.

### V. CARES

On December 8, 2018, the Social Security and SSI cost-of-living income adjustments (COLA) were made to CARES Assistance Units (AUs) in active or spend-down status. This process, referred to as Mass Modification, caused all assistance units to be put through batch eligibility. Batch eligibility examines each AU for all eligibility factors and determines program type, AU status and benefit level. Case Managers will receive an alert (**#224 Grant Changed in Batch**) for any AU with a change in status or benefit level. Also produced, if applicable, are adverse action notices.

CARES will also update the SSA and SSI income fields on cases that are in an active no pay status, providing such income is present on the UINC screen. However, eligibility will not be re-calculated or notices produced until the case is reactivated.

#### Attachments

Attachment 1: Sample Customer Notice  
Attachment 2 & 3: Sample Facility Notice

#### Inquiries

For policy questions, please email [fia.policy@maryland.gov](mailto:fia.policy@maryland.gov). For systems-related questions, please email [fia.bsdm@maryland.gov](mailto:fia.bsdm@maryland.gov).

c: DHS Executive Staff  
MDH Executive Staff  
Constituent Services  
DHS Help Desk  
FIA Management Staff  
DHS OIG

# Attachment 1

\_\_\_\_\_ Department of Social Services

Name

Date of Notice

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Category/Case#

\_\_\_\_\_  
Case Manager

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone#

Effective January 2019, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security benefits from the Federal Government will increase. Project Home Levels A, B, C and D rates will remain the same.

Depending on whether you receive benefits other than Public Assistance and the care home where you live (Assisted Living or Project Home – Level A, B, C or D), there may be a change in your public assistance check. Please see below to review how your public assistance check is now being calculated.

Your public assistance check has been computed as follows:

Cost of care	_____
Personal needs allowance	_____
Total needs	_____
Deductions (specify)	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Your benefits under the Public Assistance to Adults program will:

- Stay the same
- Increase to \_\_\_\_\_ beginning in \_\_\_\_\_.
- Be reduced to \_\_\_\_\_ beginning in \_\_\_\_\_.

Stop. You received or will receive your last check in

\_\_\_\_\_.

Beginning in January 2019 you owe the cost of care, \$\_\_\_\_\_, to the operator of the facility where you live. The amount of money allowed for personal needs will still be \$82.00.

If you have any questions, please call the case manager listed above. You may appeal this decision if you do not agree with it. Information on how to appeal is printed on the other side of this letter.

SAMPLE

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOU DON'T AGREE WITH THIS DECISION**

1. You can call the local department contact telephone number on the first page of this letter and ask for a conference.  
Your case manager will be able to answer any questions you may have.

**AND**

2. You can also file an appeal. Your local department has the necessary forms and will help you to file an appeal. Call the local department contact number on the first page of this letter for appeal forms and more information about how to file an appeal.

**YOUR CHECK MAY BE CONTINUED UNTIL A DECISION IS REACHED ON YOUR APPEAL IF YOU FILE YOUR APPEAL WITHIN 10 DAYS OF THE "DATE OF NOTICE" ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS LETTER. YOU MUST FILE YOUR APPEAL WITHIN 90 DAYS OF THE "DATE OF NOTICE" ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS LETTER.**

## **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU APPEAL**

An appeal hearing will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for you and the officer who will hear your case. You should come to this hearing. If you wish, you can be represented by a lawyer or a friend or relative. You may get legal help through the Maryland Legal Services Program or the Legal Aid Bureau in some areas of the state. In Baltimore City, Legal Aid's Office is at 500 E. Lexington Street (telephone number 410-951-7777). In the counties, your case manager will tell you how to get free legal services.

At least six days before the hearing, the local department will send you a summary of the information used to reach its decision. If you want any employees of the local department to be present at your hearing, you may notify the hearings office and tell why you want these employees to be present. You or your lawyer can look at the documents used by the local department to reach its decision.

A hearings officer will send you a written decision that says whether the local department's decision is found to be correct within 90 days after receiving your appeal request. If the local department's decision is found to be correct, and you have continued to receive an incorrect amount of benefits while waiting for a decision, you may have to

repay the public assistance you received to which you were not entitled.

If you have any questions about your right to appeal, please call your local department at the contact telephone number listed on the first page of this notice and/or see the "How to Have a Hearing" insert for more information.

SAMPLE



## Attachment 2

December 08, 2018

Operators of Project Home Facilities

Dear Sir or Madam:

Please note that effective January 2019, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security benefits will increase by 2.8%. Levels A, B, C, D and Assisted Living will remain the same. Customers will continue to receive \$82.00 for the personal needs allowance.

Effective January 2019, customers under your care that receive Social Security/SSI benefits may see changes in their public assistance checks. Local Departments of Social Services will notify affected customers concerning changes in the amounts of their public assistance checks prior to the new year.

Sincerely,

Netsanet Kibret, Executive Director  
Family Investment Administration

## Attachment 3

December 08, 2018

Operators of Licensed Assisted Living Facilities

Dear Sir or Madam:

Please note that effective January 2019, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security benefits will increase by 2.8%. The amount the customer is allowed for personal needs (\$82.00) will remain the same.

Effective January 2019, customers under your care that receive Social Security/SSI benefits may see changes in their public assistance checks. Additionally, the notification will state that customers will continue to be responsible for paying for their care with the income they receive.

Sincerely,

Netsanet Kibret, Executive Director  
Family Investment Administration