

Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Questions & Answers

Q: What is the FSS Program?

A: It is a voluntary program available to eligible HCV and PBV Assistance Program participants seeking to become independent of cash assistance and rental subsidies by introducing them to services offered by service providers in the community, and establishing a *five-year Individual & Training Services Plan (ITSP)* that helps set specific goals to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Q: What is the benefit to participating in the FSS Program?

A: Not only do you receive services from agencies in the community, but you and your family have an opportunity to have an Escrow Account (or Savings Account) in your name. As your earned income increases, so does your rent; thereby, decreasing the housing assistance made by EHA. As a rule, the amount of the increase in tenant rent to owner resulting from an increase in earned income is escrowed.

Q: What is the role of an FSS Coordinator?

A: FSS program coordinators assist the family in the development of the ITSP, they assure that FSS program participants are linked to the supportive services they need to achieve economic self-sufficiency, and that the escrow account is properly maintained, among other responsibilities.

Q: What are my responsibilities under the FSS Contract?

A: The FSS contract requires the family comply with their lease, that all FSS family members are free of welfare assistance for 12 consecutive months before the FSS contract is completed, and that the HOH seeks and maintains suitable employment.

Q: Can I participate in the program if I am receiving cash assistance and/or unemployed?

A: Yes. You must be a participant of EHA's HCV or PBV Assistance program. The main goal of FSS is to help you seek and maintain suitable employment.

Q: Can I participate in the program if I am disabled?

A: Yes. If you are a HCV or PBV participant & your goal is to seek and maintain suitable employment to be free of all state & federal assistance, you can participate in the program provided you meet the eligibility criteria. (Please see the EHA's FSS Eligibility Criteria Sheet.)

Q: Can I graduate from the FSS Program in less than 5 years and receive my escrow balance?

A: Yes. When 30 percent of your family's monthly adjusted income equals or exceeds the fair market rent for the unit size for which you qualify (based on EHA's subsidy standards), the family is welfare free for 12 consecutive months before the contract expiration date, and all the FSS obligations are met, you are eligible to graduate in less than 5 years and receive your escrow balance minus any amounts owed to EHA under your lease agreement.

Q: Who can be the Head of Household for the FSS Program?

A: Only one adult member per family will be designated as HOH. That person is obligated to obtain & maintain suitable employment by the end of the Contract Term. Other adult members may develop a 5-year plan to attain employment & received FSS services, if approved by the FSS Coordinator & services are available.

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Q: What happens to the escrow amount if the HOH dies or moves out and the family does not wish to modify the contract and continue participating in the FSS program?

A: The escrow balance will be forfeited.

Q: Will the escrow savings account affect my eligibility for welfare and/or food stamps?

A: No. You will not have access to your escrow funds until you complete your FSS Contract. The escrow monies are not considered income until you complete the contract and receive the funds.

Q: If I am over the income limit for housing assistance, can I continue the FSS program?

A: No. When your housing caseworker determines that you are no longer eligible to receive housing assistance, your FSS Contract automatically ends and your escrow balance is disbursed to you provided you have completed all your obligations of your FSS Contract.

Q: I am currently the HOH and my daughter or son would like to be the FSS HOH, can I make them the new HOH for FSS?

A: Yes. A new HOH may be designated as long as he or she is 18 years of age or older. The new HOH will be obligated to develop a new ITSP and plan to seek and maintain suitable employment by the end of the Contract Term. This person would also become the new HOH for housing.

Q: My 17 year-old daughter is now working. Does the increase from her earned income increase my escrow credit?

A: No. Income from family members in the household who are 18 years old or older affects your escrow credit.

Q: Will I have to pay taxes on the escrow amount I receive?

A: No. This amount is considered "welfare" payment by the IRS; therefore, it is not taxable.

Q: If I am still receiving welfare aid at the end of the contract, what happens to my escrow balance?

A: One of the agreements of the contract is that everyone in the household is free from TANF (cash assistance) for 12 months consecutive prior to the completion of the contract. In some cases, it may be possible to extend the length of the contract up to two more years.

Q: Will my escrow be affected if I am in the FSS Program & do not report an increase of income when I should have for a re-certification?

A: Yes. EHA will calculate the increase of the rent you should have been paying. As a result, you may be at risk of termination of your FSS contract, which could forfeit your escrow balance.

Q: Once I graduate from the FSS program and I receive an FSS escrow check, can I use the money for a down payment on a home or purchase a car?

A: Yes. You can use your escrow funds for whatever you wish.

Q: How do I sign up for the FSS Program?

A: To sign up, please call EHA's FSS Program Coordinator at (425) 303-1136.