

Blind Work Expenses

An SSI Earned Income Exclusion

SSI Earned Income Exclusions – Rules for Everyone

- ◆ First \$20 of gross earned income per month disregarded, if not used against unearned income.
- ◆ Additional \$65 per month disregarded.
- ◆ One half of remaining earned income disregarded. What remains is countable earned income.
- ◆ Countable income is subtracted from SSI base rate to determine the monthly SSI payment.

Blind Work Expenses (BWEs) as Deductions from Earned Income

- ◆ If the SSI recipient is statutorily blind, the same earned income exclusions apply and an additional amount of BWEs are also excluded.
- ◆ As the list below illustrates, the exclusions do not have to be related to the blindness but need only be work-related.
- ◆ Nearly every statutorily blind SSI recipient who is working will qualify for some BWEs.

List of the Most Common Blind Work Expenses

- ◆ Federal, state and local income taxes
- ◆ Social Security and Medicare taxes (i.e., FICA)
- ◆ Mandatory pension contributions
- ◆ Meals consumed during work hours
- ◆ Training to use an impairment-related item or an item which is reasonably attributable to work (e.g., cane travel, Braille, computer course for computer operator)
- ◆ A guide dog (cost of purchase and all associated expenses, including food, licenses, and veterinary services)
- ◆ Transportation to and from work
- ◆ Attendant care services (in the work setting, to get a person to and from work and, in some cases, in the home)
- ◆ Structural modifications to get a person to and from work
- ◆ Medical devices, medical supplies and physical therapy

A BWE Does Not Have to be Related to Person's Blindness

- ◆ It need only be related to the cost of working.
- ◆ It can relate to a second disability, other than blindness (e.g., person with multiple sclerosis can use a wheelchair van service cost as a BWE if it gets him or her to work). However, it can be for a work-related expense unrelated to blindness or another disability (e.g., meals, taxes).

See example of budget using blind work expenses on page 2.

Example: SSI Budget Using Blind Work Expenses

- ◆ Sam is statutorily blind, lives alone, and makes \$22,620 per year (\$1,885 per month)
- ◆ Sam has the following \$529 in monthly expenses that qualify as BWEs: income taxes - \$85, FICA - \$144, union dues - \$15, transportation - \$88, guide dog expenses - \$65, lunches - \$132

Calculation of SSI check:

Step 1 Total earned income:	\$1885	Step 2 Base SSI Rate (NY 2017 living alone)	\$ 822
Exclusions (\$65 + \$20)	- <u>85</u>	Counted income	- <u>371</u>
	\$1800	SSI benefit	\$ 451
½ remainder	- <u>900</u>		
	\$ 900		
Blind work expenses	- <u>529</u>		
Counted income	\$ 371		

At-A-Glance Series

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