

Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS)

The PASS is a special SSI rule that allows an individual to exclude, or not count income or resources that are used to support a work goal.

Background: SSI's Income and Resource Rules

- ◆ SSI recipients typically receive monthly benefits based on New York's 2026 SSI rate of \$1,081 (living alone) or \$1017 (living with others). The rates usually change each year.
- ◆ If the individual has income, other than the SSI payment, a part of that income is subtracted from the SSI base rate to determine the monthly SSI payment.

Example: Joan lives alone and receives Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) of \$620 per month based on a mental illness. The SSI program will disregard \$20 and the remaining \$600 is subtracted from the \$1,081 SSI base rate, giving Joan a \$481 monthly SSI payment. Her total monthly income is \$1,101 (\$620 SSDI, \$481 SSI). As an SSI recipient Joan will also qualify for automatic Medicaid.

- ◆ SSI recipients are allowed no more than \$2,000 in countable resources. A bank account, cash on hand, and the value of stocks, for example, will count against the \$2,000 limit.

How a PASS Works

- ◆ When income or resources are used in an approved PASS to support a work goal, the income and/or resources will not count when determining SSI eligibility or payment amount.
- ◆ The result is that the person will be eligible for SSI, or a larger SSI payment based on the countable income and resources that remain.

Example: Joan from above plans to attend a two-year community college program to become an occupational therapy assistant. She will receive support from the New York's ACCES-VR to pay for tuition, transportation to college, and books. She will still need the following to achieve her work goal: \$600 for a laptop computer; \$9,000 for a used car to travel to work or work sites; and \$600 for the first six months of car insurance. Joan proposes to set aside \$600 of her SSDI payment each month to save for these items to meet her work goal.

If Joan's PASS proposal is approved, the SSI program will no longer count the \$600 of SSDI. This will reduce her countable income to \$0 and increase her SSI payment to \$1,081 per month. With \$600 per month in PASS savings, in 17 months she can save the \$10,200 needed to pay for the computer, car, and insurance. If her PASS starts in July 2026 and continues through November 2027 (17 months), she can purchase her car and insure it as early as December 2027, allowing her to travel to internships and job interviews based on a projected graduation in May 2028. Joan still has \$1,101 for monthly living expenses (\$1,081 SSI, \$20 of SSDI not counted under usual rules) – the same amount as before her PASS was submitted!

Criteria for PASS Approval

- ◆ Must be in writing, preferably using Form SSA-545
- ◆ Must contain: a feasible work goal; a savings and spending plan; a list of items and services needed and their cost; and a timetable for achieving the goal.
- ◆ Must be expected to increase person's prospect for self-support
 - For person who receives SSI (or a combination of SSI and SSDI) before PASS is approved, the work goal must be expected to significantly reduce the SSI payment amount.
 - For person who receives only SSDI before PASS is approved, the work goal must be expected to eliminate the SSDI payment (i.e., the proposed work must be at the substantial gainful activity level, i.e., \$1,690/\$2,830 for statutorily blind per month in 2026).

The Feasible Work Goal

- ◆ Must specify a job or profession.
- ◆ Must have reasonable chance of attaining the goal, in light of the disability.
- ◆ Goal could be for full-time or part-time work.
- ◆ Goal could be to move from part-time to full-time work.

What Money Goes Into a PASS?

- ◆ Earned income (wages from a job, income from a business)
- ◆ Unearned income (such as a Social Security payment or VA pension)
- ◆ Resources (such as savings, personal injury award, inheritance, lump sum SSDI or SSI award)

What Expenses Are Allowed in an Approved PASS?

All reasonable and necessary expenses, such as:

- ◆ College or training costs
- ◆ Transportation, including vehicle lease or purchase
- ◆ Vehicle insurance, maintenance, repairs, warranty costs
- ◆ Computer, software, and Internet costs
- ◆ Work clothes, professional clothing, childcare
- ◆ Business start-up costs
- ◆ Anything reasonably tied to the work goal

Time Limits

- ◆ The PASS can be approved for whatever period is needed to achieve the goal.

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