



# Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

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Executive Deputy Commissioner

## General Information System (GIS) Message

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### Section 1

<b>Transmittal:</b>	21 TA/DC069 Upstate and New York City
<b>Date:</b>	October 08, 2021
<b>To:</b>	Subscribers
<b>Suggested Distribution:</b>	Commissioners, Temporary Assistance (TA) Directors, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Directors, Staff Development Coordinators
<b>From:</b>	Alison Maura, Director of Temporary Assistance and HEAP Employment and Income Support Programs
<b>Subject:</b>	Telephone and Digital Interviews
<b>Effective Date:</b>	October 9, 2021
<b>Contact Information:</b>	Temporary Assistance Bureau at (518) 474-9344 <a href="mailto:otda.sm.cees.tabureau@otda.ny.gov">otda.sm.cees.tabureau@otda.ny.gov</a>

### Attachments:

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### Section 2

The purpose of this General Information System (GIS) message is to notify social services districts (districts) that effective October 9, 2021, Chapter 144 of the Laws of 2021 amended certain sections of Social Service Law (SSL) 134-a, SSL 349-a and SSL 132 to allow for the use of telephone and digital interviews for purposes of determining eligibility for Public Assistance (PA) benefits, at the request of the applicant or recipient (A/R).

As a result of these changes, districts may conduct the initial application or recertification interview, including drug/alcohol and domestic violence screenings, by telephone or other digital means, at the request of the applicant or recipient (A/R) without the need for a waiver.

#### *Alcohol and Substance Abuse Screenings*

Districts must continue drug/alcohol screenings for PA A/Rs using the [LDSS 4571](#): "Alcohol and Substance Abuse Screening Referral Form," in accordance with current policy. These screenings may now be conducted by telephone or other digital means, at the request of the A/R.

District staff must continue to read/discuss the 10 questions from Section A of the [LDSS 4571](#) and record answers during the interview. This section no longer requires face-to-face completion. Section B (1) of this screening form must be completed based on your observation of the client, if interviewed in person. There is no requirement to complete Section B (1) of the behavioral observation section if not interviewing the client face-to-face. Additionally, if performing the screening by telephone or other digital means, it must be noted in the signature section that the screening was performed in such manner and

the form must be dated by the worker conducting the screening. If the screening results in a need for further assessment, the A/R must be given a notice that includes either information on the scheduled appointment or the name of the treatment provider and instructions for scheduling the assessment.

### *Domestic Violence (DV) Screenings*

DV screenings conducted by means of telephone or other digital means, must be documented using the universal “Domestic Violence Screening Form” ([LDSS-4583](#)). As is current policy, completion of the form by the A/R remains voluntary and the answers must be kept confidential. If performing the screening by telephone or other digital means, it must be noted in the signature section that the screening was performed in such manner and the form must be dated by the worker conducting the screening. Districts are reminded that, when conducting DV screenings over the phone, there may be victims of DV who are not comfortable identifying themselves as such, especially if the abuser is present during the call. Therefore, district staff should reiterate to all A/Rs the ability to ask to speak to a Domestic Violence Liaison (DVL) at any time by contacting the district.

If conducting PA eligibility or recertification interviews by phone, it is advisable to ask the A/R if it is safe for them to talk before introducing the screening or discussing anything DV related. Interviewing the client alone is the most preferred method for protecting confidentiality and improving the chances of receiving accurate information. Interviewers should always start the DV screening by asking who else is present in the room and if it is a good time to talk. Once an A/R has indicated they can talk privately, begin the screening process. However, be mindful to check in periodically throughout the interview to ensure the A/R still has privacy. Some possible indicators that it may not be safe to continue the interview may include: the A/R starts whispering, has an increased reluctance to answer questions and provide information, or there are interruptions or questions by someone in the background. If there is any indication that the A/R’s safety may be compromised by continuing the interview, it should be stopped immediately. If the interview cannot be conducted in a safe and confidential environment, then the A/R should be provided an appropriate contact number and advised to call back to complete the interview as soon as it is safe to do so within the eligibility determination period.

While discussing the A/R’s DV responses to the screening questions, the district should inform the A/R about the following resources, as appropriate:

- 24-hour NYS Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline phone number: 1-800-942- 6906; text messaging number: 1-844-997-2121;
- The chat option that is available at: [www.opdv.ny.gov](http://www.opdv.ny.gov);
- Available local DV services, including contact information for these services.

This information may also be found on the [LDSS-4905](#): “Domestic Violence Information for All Public Assistance (PA) Applicants and Recipients.”

Further guidance on the impacts of these statutory changes, including Alcohol and Substance Abuse and DV screening protocols, will be forthcoming.