

# Navigating through the Confusion

## Employment & Social Security Disability Benefits

Eric M. Schmidt, MA, CPWIC

Kyle A. Beeson, MA, CRC



# Objectives

- What is Ticket to Work?
- What are Social Security Work Incentives?
  - How can they help? How are they accessed?
- Who can help?
  - Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Employment Networks
  - Benefits Planners

# Ticket to Work Background

- Ticket to Work - Established by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, enacted in 2002
  - Competition: VR vs. EN (Win - Lose)
  - Additional Bureaucracy & Red Tape
  - Created barriers to success
- Ticket 2.0 - 2008 amendment, revised regulations, and the 2014 Work Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
  - Cooperation, not Competition (Win/Win)
    - coordinate, educate, and maximize benefit for all parties involved
  - Partnership Plus - Sequential Services
  - Teamwork builds bridges to success

# Ticket to Work Background

- What is it? Who receives one?
  - A physical “Ticket”? - a packet of info, online resources and access to “work incentives”
  - Individuals age 18 through 64 entitled to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and in ‘current pay’ status (receiving check)
- Entitles beneficiary to a variety of free benefits designed to:
  - Assist in finding employment
  - Maintain employment with any necessary supports
  - Return to the disability rolls if unable to maintain employment due to disability
  - Exempt beneficiaries from Continuing Disability Reviews (CDR) provided “Timely Progress” is made in employment, education/training, or a combination
- Entitles service providers to payments from SSA based upon earnings of participants

# Timely Progress

## Will you review my disability while I am in the program?

We won't review your disability as long as you make progress in the Ticket to Work program. (If we started a disability review before you began participating, we'll finish the review.) If you have any questions about the Ticket to Work program, call the Ticket Call Center toll-free at **1-866-968-7842**, or TTY **1-866-833-2967**.

12-month review period	Work requirement	Degree or certification program	Technical, trade or vocational program
First year	3 out of 12 months with trial work period level earnings	Completed 60 percent of full-time course load for 1 year	Completed 60 percent of full-time course load for 1 year
Second year	6 out of 12 months with trial work period level earnings	Completed 75 percent of full-time course load for 1 year	Completed 75 percent of full-time course load for 1 year
Third year	9 out of 12 months with substantial gainful activity level earnings*	Completed a 2-year program or, for a 4-year program, completed another academic year of full-time study	Completed the program
Fourth year	9 out of 12 months with substantial gainful activity level earnings*	Completed another academic year of full-time study	
Fifth year	6 out of 12 months of substantial gainful activity with no Social Security disability or SSI benefits	Completed another academic year of full-time study	
Sixth year	Work criteria are same as 5th year for following 12-month periods	Completed 4-year degree program	

# Ticket to Work Background

- Why does it exist?
  - Expand employment for individuals with disabilities
  - Provide greater choice in providers/employment services available
    - Private Employment Networks
    - State VR Agencies
    - Both?
  - Reduce dependence on SSI/SSDI cash benefits
    - Over 13.5 million disabled beneficiaries receiving over \$100B annually
    - Less than 1% leave benefit rolls each year and 1/3 return to benefit status within 3 years

# How does the Ticket work?

- Are there benefits to assigning a Ticket? Are there risks?
  - General Info (including a video): <https://choosework.ssa.gov/about/index.html>
  - How it works: <https://choosework.ssa.gov/about/how-it-works/index.html>
  - Success Stories: <https://choosework.ssa.gov/success-stories/index.html>
- How to choose a provider? Search by zipcode, services needed, Guided Search
  - <https://choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/>

# How does the Ticket work continued...

- Assigning a Ticket with a VR or EN
  - Signing a plan for services with a provider place the Ticket is “In-Use” or “Assigned” to the agency and cannot be assigned or In-Use with another agency providing services simultaneously
- Can a Ticket only be used once?
  - A Ticket to Work can be “Assigned” to another EN/VR following closure of a case (This process is often called a **Ticket Handoff**)
  - An individual can return for further services (change or advance a career, etc.)

# Who are the players?

- Maryland State Department of Education/Division of Rehabilitation Services (MSDE/DORS)
  - State/Federal Funds. Serving both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, youth and adult.
  - <https://dors.maryland.gov/Pages/default.aspx>
- Employment Networks (ENs)
  - Has certified/licensed staff per State/Federal regulations
  - Includes State VRs such as DORS as well as private non-profit and for-profit groups such as CRP (Community Rehab Programs), One-stops, Schools, Training programs

# Who are the players continued...

- Benefits Planners/Community Partner Work Incentive Coordinators
  - DORS consumers receive this service free of charge
  - Many ENs also offer on-staff benefits planners
  - Work Incentive Planning and Assistance: <http://www.md-win.org/>
    - If not connected with VR or an EN
- The Social Security Ticket to Work Program Manager
  - 866-968-7842 / 866-833-2967 (TTY)
  - [support@choosework.ssa.gov](mailto:support@choosework.ssa.gov)

# Who are the players continued...

- Employers
  - Looking for qualified candidates
  - Often seeking to diversify the workforce
  
- And of course the beneficiary themselves

# Let's Talk about Social Security Benefits

<b><u>Type of Benefit:</u></b>	Title XVI: Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	Title II: Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Childhood Disability Benefits (CDB), Widow/Widower Disability Benefits (DWB)
<b><u>Source of payments:</u></b>	General tax revenues	Disability trust fund: Funded through income tax deductions (FICA)
<b><u>Minimum Initial Qualifications:</u></b>	<p>Must meet SSA's disability criteria</p> <p>Must meet income &amp; resource limits</p> <p>Needs based</p>	<p>Must meet SSA's disability criteria</p> <p>Must have contributed to FICA for a sufficient period of time (# of quarters based on age and work history)</p>
<b><u>Health Insurance Coverage:</u></b>	Medicaid	Medicare
<b><u>Resource limits:</u></b>	\$2000 individual \$3000 eligible couple	No resource limit

# Defining Disability according to the Social Security Administration (SSA)

- SSA defines disability for both SSI and SSDI programs as the inability to engage in **Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA)** by reason of any medical impairment.
  - SGA is a dollar figure that typically increased each year and differs between impairment groups (2019 SGA amounts are \$1220/month or \$2040/month for blind)
    - Social Security has very specific ‘Listings’ to define impairment type
- Disability must have lasted or be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months or result in death.

# Common Questions

- Will I lose my disability payment if I go to work?
- Will I lose my medical coverage?
- What if I work but then later my disability worsens or I can no longer continue my employment?
- It took so long to be allowed by Social Security, won't going to work jeopardize that? And will I just have to restart the whole process again?

# SSI and Going to Work

- Individuals on SSI benefits are ALWAYS better off financially if they choose to go to work
- The most SSI any one person can be receiving in 2019 is \$771 per month. (That's below the poverty line)
- The actual amount of SSI a person will receive is dependent on what other income the person has
  - SSI truly is meant as a supplement

# SSI and Going to Work continued...

- Adjustments to SSI payments are not a dollar for dollar decrease. Instead it is an approximate reduction of \$1 SSI for every \$2 earned
- There are 'safety nets' called work incentives designed to assist beneficiaries
- Medical Assistance (Medicaid) can be maintained even if SSI checks are reduced to \$0
- There are tax refunds that may make working even more beneficial

# SSDI and Going to Work

- Individuals on SSDI benefits are USUALLY better off financially if they choose to go to work
- Title II beneficiaries have a series of “safety nets” available to them while they are returning to work
  - The “safety nets” each have unique rules regarding their use
- If a beneficiary works enough that their Title II check ceases, they can often get it back again if they later stop working or substantially reduce earnings

# SSDI and Going to Work continued...

- It is important Title II beneficiaries have the information and supports (benefits planning) to determine how their work goal may impact their benefits and access these “safety nets”
- Medicare can be maintained even if SSDI checks are ceased and in many cases, individuals may qualify for Medical Assistance (Medicaid) to further reduce costs
  - Medicaid will pay the Medicare deductibles
- There are tax refunds that may make working even more beneficial

# Let's take a look at some common “Safety Nets”

## SSI

- Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE)
- Blind Work Expense (BWE)
- 1619(b)
- Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)

## SSDI

- Trial Work Period (TWP)
- Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE)
- Special Rules for the Blind (Higher SGA)
- Continuation of Medicare

# “Safety Nets” that apply to both types of disability benefits

- Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE)
  - Used when beneficiary has out-of-pocket expenses related to a disability during a month they are working and the expenses are necessary to continue working
    - Must be related to supporting the disability, paid out of pocket and in the month wages are earned
    - Examples: copays, assistive technology, specialized transportation, attendant care, service animals/care
- Blind Work Expenses (BWE)
  - In addition to the above, there are a number of additional expenditures that may be included. Working with a benefits planner is essential to identify all available

# “Safety Nets” that apply to both types of disability benefits continued...

- Subsidy/Special Condition
  - Support provided by an employer or third party that may result in beneficiary receiving more pay than the actual value of the services performed
  - Examples: increased supervision, fewer/simpler tasks, additional breaks, job coach on site
- Section 301
  - SSA will continue providing benefits for recipients even when they no longer meet the SSA disability standard if:
    - The recipient is enrolled in an approved employment or education program prior to the month in which the recipient was found not disabled, and
    - SSA determines that participation in the program increases the likelihood the recipient will not have to return to the disability or blindness benefit rolls.

# SSI Work Incentives

- ▶ **Student Earned Income Exclusion**
  - ▶ Allows a person under age 22 and regularly attending school to exclude earnings from income
    - ▶ For 2019: SSA excludes \$1,870 monthly up to a yearly maximum of \$7,550
- ▶ **Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS)**
  - ▶ Allows an individual to set aside income and/or resources for a specified period of time to achieve a specific work goal
  - ▶ Examples of PASS expenditures: items/capital to grow a business, education, child care, equipment or tools, uniforms, etc.
- ▶ **1619 (b)**
  - ▶ Provides for the continuation of Medicaid when SSI check reduced to \$0

# SSDI Work Incentives

## Trial Work Period (TWP)

- 9 non-consecutive months to test ability to work
- must be completed within 60 months
- In 2017, \$840/month gross wages
- keep SSDI check

## Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE)

- 36 consecutive months immediately following TWP
- Eligible for SSDI check if earnings below SGA (\$1170 in 2016. Blind SGA=\$1950)

## Expedited Reinstatement (EXR)

- After Termination
- 6 months of cash payment
- Quicker re-determination
- Don't have to file full application

# That's a lot of info: what now?

- ▶ If a beneficiary is interested in exploring employment
  - ▶ Review service options: VR or EN or both!
  - ▶ Get educated on benefits: connect with a benefits planner
  - ▶ Develop a plan
  - ▶ Identify long-term supports to maintain success

Done right, this can lead to a win for all involved.

# Creating a “Win” for everyone

## ➤ Beneficiaries

- Follow along support throughout the process
  - Returning to work
  - Maintaining employment
  - Seamless transition through handoff coordination
- Placement at higher levels of earnings (TWP or SGA)
  - improve livelihood, self-sufficiency, happiness
- Tax incentives
- Benefits planning to maintain earnings & address questions during/after VR case
  - From FEAR to CONFIDENCE

# Creating a “Win” continued...

- Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Increase cost reimbursement
  - Reduces VR waitlist for services
  - Less recidivism (individuals maintain employment longer)
  - Creates long term supports for consumers at/near SGA to ensure continued earnings
  - Meet WIOA performance measures
    - training, employment (2nd/4<sup>th</sup> quarter), employer relations, provision of appropriate services (benefits planning)

# Creating a “Win” continued...

## ➤ Employment Networks

- Increase EN Ticket Milestone Payments
- Increases linkage between VR and EN to continue supports
- Transition from vendor of services to DORS to EN provision of service
- Increases collaboration

# Creating a “Win” continued...

## ➤ Employers

- Provided with quality candidates
- Connected with employees who maintain employment longer with proper supports in place
- Increased workforce diversity
- Improved customer base through visibility and community inclusion initiatives
- Tax incentives

# Resources

- <https://yourtickettowork.ssa.gov/about/history.html>
- [https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat\\_snapshot/](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat_snapshot/)
- [https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/prog\\_highlights/RatesLimits2019.html](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/prog_highlights/RatesLimits2019.html)
- <https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/COLA/sga.html>
- <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-impairment-relatedwork.htm>
- <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/subsidies.htm>
- <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-student-earned-income.htm>
- <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-plans-self-support.htm>
- Virginia Commonwealth University Work Incentives Counseling Training Manual and Annual Updates. Online at: <https://vcu-ntdc.org/resources/ntcmanual.cfm>
- SSA POMS: Policy Information. Online at <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/>
- SSA Work Incentives General Information available online at <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/generalinfo.htm#ssdi>

# Contact Information

- Eric Schmidt: 410-554-9295  
[eric.schmidt@maryland.gov](mailto:eric.schmidt@maryland.gov)
- Kyle Beeson: 410-554-9547  
[kyle.beeson@Maryland.gov](mailto:kyle.beeson@Maryland.gov)