



10 JUL 2018



Dear 

On 24 April 2018 you emailed the Ministry requesting information about letter templates under the Official Information Act 1982.

I would like to apologise for the delay in responding to the information requested below:

- *All information relating to any standard template letter currently used to advise clients of suspension of a benefit which contains the words "because you have separated from your partner."*

A benefit suspension is where a client's payment has been temporarily stopped. The decision to suspend a benefit is not taken lightly. When Work and Income becomes aware that a client and their partner have separated, Case Managers work to ensure that both people are receiving the right assistance. Temporarily stopping a benefit can avoid unnecessary debts for the clients.

New measures have been introduced to ensure that all options are explored before a decision to suspend is made. Additionally, the decision to suspend will not be made by a single person. Case Managers must consider whether:

- information or contact is required from the client to confirm their entitlement, and all options for obtaining this information have been exhausted
- the correct process has been followed
- alternative actions can be taken
- there is an impact on the health, safety or well-being of the client or their family.

Enclosed are copies of two letter templates used to notify clients of the suspension of their benefits for a range of different reasons. In both instances, the template contains the following sentence:

"This letter is to let you know that your [benefit name] has [stopped/ been suspended] from [date] [reason]"

The phrase *"because you have separated from your partner"* will be inserted as applicable in place of "[reason]".

Because these letter templates are used for a range of situations, the final letter received by a client will only contain the relevant sentences which match their individual circumstances.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and attachments on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us regarding template letters used to advise clients of suspension of a benefit, containing the words 'because you have separated from your partner', please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Cassandra Wise
Team Manager, Issue Resolution

Letter 1

Client number [Client number would be included here]

[Address]

[Address]

[Address]

[Address] [Post Code]

Dear [Client Name]

This letter is to let you know your [type of assistance received] [has stopped] from [date] [reason].

Because of this change, you've been overpaid [\$amount] from [date] to [date].

Because of this change, you've been overpaid from [date] to [date]. This includes [\$amount] paid to you and [\$amount] paid to your partner.

Because of this change, you and your partner have been overpaid [\$amount] each from [date] to [date].

You were repaying the money you owe us from your [type of assistance received] and the remaining amount is [\$amount].

The amount you now owe us is [\$amount].

The Working for Families Tax Credit payments we pay you will continue until [date].

[Child Care Assistance Type] for [Child]

You may use your Community Services Card until it expires.

If you want to apply for a new card after that, call us on 0800 999 999.

If you disagree with this decision, you can ask for a review. We must receive your request for review within three months of this letter.

For more details, please see the 'general information' section at the back of this letter.

Please tell us straight away about any changes in your circumstances that could affect your payments, such as income or living arrangements, so we can make sure you're receiving the right payments.

You can find examples of what can affect your payments in the 'general information' section at the back of this letter.

You can visit our website or call us for more information.

Our contact details are in the 'general information' section at the back of this letter.

You can contact your service provider, visit the Youth Service website (youthservice.govt.nz) or call us for more information.

Our contact details are in the 'general information' section at the back of this letter.

[Sign off text e.g. Yours Sincerely]

[Staff member name]

[Job Title]

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Letter 2

Client number [Client number would be included here]

[Address]

[Address]

[Address]

[Address] [Post Code]

Dear [Client Name]

This letter is to let you know your [type of assistance received] [has stopped] from [date] [reason].

Your Disability Allowance for counselling costs [stopped] from [date]. That's because we've now paid for the number of sessions we agreed to.

If you've had a dependent child or children come into or leave your care, please tell us straight away. This could affect your future payments.

Before your payments stopped, they reduced as you hadn't applied for child support or named the other parent.

If your benefit has been reduced for three months, we'll reduce payments a further \$6 a week. This will still apply if your benefit is suspended or expired during this time.

As your benefit has stopped we may need to review your childcare assistance payments. If you still need childcare assistance, please let us know.

Because of this change, you've been overpaid [\$amount] from [date] to [date].

Because of this change, you've been overpaid from [date] to [date]. This includes [\$amount] paid to you and \$amount] paid to your partner.

Because of this change, you and your partner have been overpaid [\$amount] each from [date] to [date].

You also owe us [\$amount].

You owe us [\$amount].

This means you now owe us [\$amount]

Please call us within seven days to talk about ways to repay this.

Cancelling your benefit may affect your entitlement to Working for Families Tax Credit. Inland Revenue pays these credits to people who are working. An agreement between Work and Income and Inland Revenue means we pass all relevant information to them to assess if people qualify. This is to make sure people receive the Working for Families Tax Credit they're entitled to without needing to fill in any forms.

Inland Revenue may contact you to confirm details.

You've chosen not to receive further Working for Families Tax Credit payments from us. These will stop from [date].

To clear your arrest warrant, or if you don't think you should have a warrant, you must go to the criminal counter at a courthouse (this is called a voluntary appearance). It's best to go to the one where the arrest warrant was issued, but if that's difficult you can do it at any courthouse. You'll need to arrive early on the day otherwise it may not be possible to clear the arrest warrant that day.

If the arrest warrant can be cleared straight away, the court will give you a "Notice of bail".

If the decision has to be made by a judge, you'll be given a "Notice of hearing to withdraw an outstanding warrant to arrest" and given a new court date.

We need to see either the notice of bail or notice of hearing before your full benefit can resume.

If you disagree with this decision, you can ask for a review. We must receive your request for review within three months of this letter.

For more details, please see the 'general information' section at the back of this letter.

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