



11 March 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your request for information, made under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), which was received by the Department of Corrections (Corrections) on 29 January 2024.

On 22 February 2024, Corrections transferred questions 6-8 of your request regarding the Steps to Freedom payment (STF) to the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry), in accordance with section 14(b)(i) of the Act, as the agency best placed to respond.

The STF is only one of the ways that the Ministry can assist people upon their release from prison. Upon their release, people can test their eligibility for other types of financial assistance, including main benefits. The Ministry also offers a voluntary Prisoner Reintegration programme, which supports people released from prison to successfully reintegrate into their community. Supporting former prisoners to obtain suitable employment is one way that the Prisoner Reintegration team assists with reintegration.

You will find my responses to your questions set out below.

6.) With the department holding work to release earnings until a prisoner is released does that stop said prisoner from getting their steps to freedom payment.

The total amount of STF grant that a person released from prison may receive is reduced by the amount of money held by Corrections in their earnings account. If a person released from prison has \$350 or more in their earnings account, they would be ineligible for the STF.

I refer you to **APPENDIX 1** which features a page from the Ministry's publicly available Manuals and Procedures (MAP) website that provides further information about how the STF entitlement of people leaving prison is determined.

7.) If a prisoner has any money in their trust account does that effect the amount of the steps to freedom payment to said prisoner.

Yes, the total amount a person released from prison can receive in a STF grant is reduced by the total amount in their trust account.

Please see **APPENDIX 1** for further information in relation to this part of your request.

8.) When is the steps to freedom payment being increased as it has been the same price since the 1980's.

The Minister for Social Development and Employment has requested advice from Ministry officials regarding the STF. The Minister will consider this advice in due course.

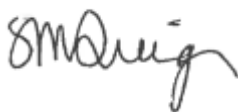
I will publish this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to write to:

Ministerial and Executive Services
Ministry of Social Development
PO Box 1556
WELLINGTON 6140

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available by calling the Ombudsman toll free on 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi

pp. 

Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services

APPENDIX 1



[Map](#) » [Income support](#) » [Extra help](#) » [Special Needs Grant](#) » [Qualifications](#) » [Payments to people in specific circumstances](#) » [Re-establishment grants](#) » [Steps to Freedom](#) » Payment of Steps to Freedom grants

<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/payment-of-steps-to-freedom-grants-01.html>

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Payment of Steps to Freedom grants

A Steps to Freedom grant can be paid to help with the actual costs the client will have to re-establish themselves in the community.

The maximum amount of a Steps to Freedom grant is \$350 (less any cash on release).

The Steps to Freedom grant can be paid:

- directly to the supplier
- to a Westpac Steps to Freedom card **or**
- by direct credit to the clients (or their agents) bank account

Note Steps to Freedom grants are non-recoverable.

More than one payment

You can make more than one payment of a Steps to Freedom grant for the same or similar purpose to a client provided the total amount paid does not exceed \$350 (less any cash on release).

Steps to Freedom grants are not restricted to one grant for the same or similar purpose in any 52 week period.

Cash on release

The amount of the Steps to Freedom grant payable must be reduced by the total of the prisoner's available cash on release as recorded on the Steps to Freedom form. This includes any amount held in the prisoner's trust account, canteen account and earnings account.

For example if a prisoner is (or is about to be) released with \$26.50 cash, this needs to be deducted from the amount of the grant that would otherwise be payable.

Examples of calculating payment

The maximum payment of a Steps to Freedom grant is \$350, and reduced by any cash on release.

Example 1

A client has \$26.50 on release and needs assistance for re-establishment costs of \$250.

The total amount payable for the grant is \$223.50 with the client contributing \$26.50 toward the remaining costs.

This will leave \$100 of the Steps to Freedom grant available for further re-establishment costs if required.

Example 2

A client has \$30.50 on release and needs help to pay re-establishment costs of \$150 to assist with clothing.

The amount payable for the grant is \$119.50 with the client contributing \$30.50 toward the remaining costs.

This will be the first of the Steps to Freedom grant which will be for further re-estabishment costs if required

The Prisoner Reintegration Team

The Prisoner Reintegration Team can help by Steps to Freedom grant up to 5 days before prisoner is released.

For more information see

- [The Prisoner Reintegration Team](#)

Steps to Freedom procedures [\[no link find out why\]](#)

Legislation

- Steps to Freedom Re-estabishment Payments for Released, Sentenced and Return and Prisoners [see 15.4](#)
Special Needs Grants Programme
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