



What are essential documents?

When leaving care, it's important to take an inventory of your essential documents. Documents such as your birth certificate, social security card, medical records, and identification card are essential to your transition to self-sufficiency. Here's a guide to help you navigate these important documents and answer any questions you may have in the process.

Section 1

What are my essential documents? What documents should I exit care with and is there a timeline for getting my essential documents?

Yes, if you are in care there is a timeline for getting your essential documents. Your caseworker should begin your transition plan no later than 17.5 years old. The transition plan includes the collection of your essential documents to be given to you at the time of your discharge from care.



NEED TO KNOW SERIES

Keys to Your Success: Essential Documents

Section 1 (continued)

Your essential documents include your birth certificate, social security card, medical record, health insurance information, education records, identification card, and a letter stating that you were previously in foster care. If applicable, these may also include tribal documents or a green card.

In addition to your essential documents, you should receive a copy of your annual credit report while you're in care. If you haven't received a copy before preparing to exit care, be sure to ask for a copy.

You can reach out to your county at any time to request these documents while you're in care. Once you age out, you'll need to request these documents through the ways listed in section 3.



Section 2

[Why are my essential documents important for my transition to self-sufficiency?](#)

Your essential documents are important to your transition to self-sufficiency because many of these documents provide proof of identification, which may give you access to opening a bank account, getting a job, registering to vote, and/or applying for college or vocational training.

When renting an apartment, your landlord or rental office may ask for identification to verify your identity and check your credit history. Additionally, these documents can be used to secure benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and/or Cash Assistance, Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), NYS Disability Insurance, and NYS health coverage.

Section 3

[Where do I obtain my essential documents? Where do I go if I need these documents after exiting care?](#)

Advocate for yourself! If you are still in care, the first step is to ask your caseworker about receiving a copy of each of your essential documents. As part of your Transition Plan, your caseworker should provide you with your essential documents and/or provide you with information on how to access them. If you find yourself without any of these documents after care, there are resources available for you to acquire these documents.