

If you're 60 or over, call your local legal aid office:

Eastern CT	800-413-7796	Western CT	800-413-7797
Hartford Area	860-541-5000	Bridgeport Area	800-809-4434
Stamford Area	800-541-8909	New Haven Area	203-946-4811

If you're under 60, call SLS for help:



Statewide Legal Services
1-800-453-3320
860-344-0380

Search our website for help:



www.ctlawhelp.org

CHILDRENS' RIGHTS

LEGAL SERVICES

SELF-HELP SERIES

A Teenager's Guide to Emancipation

June 2015



We offer free legal help in many areas, including

- welfare,
- SNAP (food stamps),
- divorce,
- child support,
- domestic violence,
- bankruptcy,
- special education,
- nursing home care,
- health insurance,
- eviction,
- foreclosure,
- and more.

See the reverse side for more about legal services.

What is emancipation?

Emancipation is a legal process that gives a teenager who is 16 or older legal independence from his or her parents or guardians. Emancipation can be an important legal tool for certain teenagers, but you should give it careful thought before moving ahead.

Who can be emancipated?

To be emancipated by the court under Connecticut law, you must be **at least 16 years old**. You must also meet one of the following conditions:

- You must be married, or
- You must be in the U.S. armed forces, or
- You must be living apart from your parents or guardian and be managing your own money, or
- The court must decide that emancipation is in the best interests of you, or your parents, or your minor child (if you have one).

How do you become emancipated?

Either you or your parents can start the emancipation process. The person who starts the process must file (or have a lawyer file) a *Petition for Emancipation* form (# JD-JM-90) with the court. If you need a lawyer to start this process or to defend yourself and you cannot afford one, the juvenile court or probate court may appoint one for you at no charge.

There will be a meeting (or a hearing) in front of a judge to talk about the petition for emancipation. Only the judge can order the emancipation.

If you're under 60, call us for help:



Statewide Legal Services
1-800-453-3320 or 860-344-0380

Search our website for help:



www.ctlawhelp.org

If you're over 60, call your local legal aid office.

Connecticut Legal Services

www.ctlegal.org

Bridgeport

1000 Lafayette Blvd 203-336-3851
Suite 950

New Britain

16 Main Street 860-225-8678

New London

125 Eugene O'Neill Dr.
Suite 120 860-447-0323

Stamford

20 Summer Street 203-348-9216

Waterbury

85 Central Avenue 203-756-8074

Willimantic

1125 Main Street 860-456-1761

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

www.ghla.org

999 Asylum Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
860-541-5000

New Haven Legal Assistance Association

www.nhlegal.org

205 Orange Street
New Haven, CT 06510
203-946-4811

Consumer Law Project for Elders

Free legal assistance to people 60 and over throughout Connecticut who have money/debt problems.

1-800-296-1467

This booklet was produced by Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, and Statewide Legal Services.

The information in this booklet is based on laws in Connecticut as of 05/2015. We hope that the information is helpful. It is not intended as legal advice. For advice on your situation, call Statewide Legal Services or contact a lawyer.

where you are would not hurt you in some way. The police can also drive you home or to another place such as another relative's home or to the Department of Children and Families. The police could also hold you for up to 12 hours while they decide what would be the best step to take. Finally the police can also report you to the Juvenile Court. At the Juvenile Court, a judge will decide if you are a runaway, truant from school, or beyond your parent's control. If the judge decides you are or have done one of these things, you might be ordered to go to school, get a job, get counseling, or give up driving a car for a while.

Can you support yourself?

Once you are emancipated, your parents no longer have to pay your bills. You will be responsible for rent, buying food, for medical bills, and buying clothing. If you have a baby, you will have to pay for the things the child needs. Until you turn 18 years old, you will nearly always be required to live with an adult to receive financial assistance from the government.

Even if you qualify for financial assistance, the money you get may not be enough to pay bills. If you have a job, think about whether your paycheck will cover all your costs.

Will you want to go back to your family?

Emancipation usually cannot be undone. Think carefully about whether you may want to go back to your family at some point or whether you are really sure that you want to live on your own from now on. Are your problems with your family just temporary or do you want to make a permanent break with your parents? Once you are emancipated, your parents could still decide to take you back.

You may find it helpful to talk privately with a lawyer about emancipation. You can call one of the legal services offices listed in this pamphlet or apply for a lawyer at the nearest Juvenile or Probate Court.

What rights does an emancipated teenager have?

When you become emancipated, you have legal rights that other teenagers do not have. You also have new responsibilities that most teenagers do not have to worry about. You should weigh these rights and responsibilities carefully as you think about emancipation.

If you are emancipated:

- ✓ You may get your own place to live, but you will be responsible for paying the rent and any other costs.
- ✓ You may get medical care without your parents' permission, but you will have to pay the bills or arrange for financial help in paying them.
- ✓ You can sign contracts in your own name, and you are responsible for living up to the contract.
- ✓ You can sue other people, and you can also be sued by others.
- ✓ You are no longer under the control of your parents, but they will also have no obligation to support you financially, or give you any food, clothing, or shelter. The Department of Children and Families will no longer be responsible for helping you if you are abused or neglected. You are, however, entitled to the same protection by the police as any other person, including the right to be protected from violence by a family or household member.
- ✓ You may buy and sell property.
- ✓ You may get a driver's license or marriage license or join the armed services without your parents' permission.
- ✓ You may enroll in a school or college of your choice without asking your parents.

How can you decide?

Here are some things you might want to think about in deciding whether you really need to be emancipated.

Emancipation is a major decision that can help a mature teenager who is getting little help from his or her parents to live a more independent life. But emancipation can also cause hard feelings within a family. It is sometimes possible for a teenager to get the relief and help that he or she needs without taking this step. ***For example:***

- If you need some relief from family problems, you might be able to stay with a friend or in a youth shelter for awhile. Most youth shelters will need your parent's permission to let you stay overnight. Or, you may want to talk to a trusted counselor or teacher.
- If your parents made you leave home or they will not let you return, or if it would be dangerous for you to return, you may be eligible for financial help even if you are not emancipated. What you apply for depends on your situation:
 1. If you are pregnant or have your child living with you and you live with an appropriate relative, apply for Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) from the Department of Social Services (DSS). Your relative must receive the check for you. Also, you will be sent to the DSS social worker for further help. The Department of Children and Families may be asked to help as well.
 2. If you are pregnant or have your child living with you and you live with an adult who is **not a relative**, you will qualify for TFA assistance only if that adult is your legal guardian or applying for legal guardianship. You may also be eligible if you live in a supervised living arrangement, such as a group home. Only in very rare cases can a pregnant or parenting teen live on her own and get a TFA check herself.

3. If you are not pregnant and do not have a child living with you, and you are living with a relative, you may also be eligible for TFA. Again, your relative must receive the check for you.

Unemancipated minors who do not live with relatives and who do not live with other adults who are either their legal guardians, or trying to be legal guardians, are probably not eligible for any cash assistance. In short, if you are staying with your friend's family for a while, but they do not want to be your legal guardian, you will probably not qualify for any sort of cash assistance.

If you are emancipated, you may qualify for State Administered General Assistance (SAGA). A SAGA payment is only \$200 per month. Any other income you have will reduce this amount, dollar for dollar, *except* the first \$150 you earn each month will not count in determining your SAGA award. You can apply for SAGA at your local DSS office.

NOTE: *Many teenagers in these situations are eligible for HUSKY medical insurance and food stamps, even if they do not qualify for cash assistance.*

How will your parents react?

Even when you are having trouble with your parents, they may be concerned about you and want to help you. Going to court to be emancipated may be very hurtful to your parents. You should think about the effect of emancipation on you and your family. If possible, sit down and discuss the problems with them before you file the petition.

Sometimes it may not be possible to talk with your parents. You may have already left home. If you are not living at home, your parent could ask the police to find you. If the police find you, they can tell your parent where you are. Before they do that, the police must first make sure that telling your parent