

# Cleveland legal aid attorney says Ohio welfare recipients could be forced to pay state twice

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• By: Sarah Buduson, newsnet5.com



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CLEVELAND - Some Ohio welfare recipients will probably be forced to pay the state money they don't owe, according David Dawson, the deputy director of the The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

"I would suspect there would be some people who would lose their tax refund and didn't owe the money," he said.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services recently sent out 22,500 collection notices to welfare recipients for overpayments.

The notices demand recipients pay their balances in 30 days or the money they owe will be taken from their state tax refunds.

Dawson said it is difficult for many welfare recipients to find documentation that can prove the state made billing errors.

He said some of the collection notices are for claims that date back to the mid-1980s. He said few people keep records dating that far back.

Dawson said he does have one client who was able to find proof Ohio billed her in error.

"We happen to have one person we're assisting who does have the documentation," he said. "We believe the state made a mistake."

Welfare recipients who believe they were billed in error and cannot find documentation can ask state officials to review their cases, said Dawson.

They can also contact The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland for free legal assistance. Its toll-free number is 1-888-817-3777.

However, Dawson said it is unlikely the state will drop the charge without documentation.

"You're out of luck," he said.

"They need to come up with something better than this to get money back," said Audrey Fellows.

The Cleveland resident received a collection notice that says she owes the state \$675.00 from a 1984 welfare overpayment.

"I know I paid it. I know I paid it," she said.

Fellows said she anticipates she will have no choice but to pay the bill again. She said she has been unable to locate her receipts.

NewsChannel5 Investigator Sarah Buduson contacted the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services on Tuesday and Wednesday for a comment on how it will handle billing error claims, but has not yet received a response.

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