

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE

As you read this annual report, you will see that the Department of Social Services – Economic Security (DSS-ES) served over 190,000 County citizens, or 41% of the county's population, through one or more of our programs. These services include cash, food, heating and child care assistance, health insurance and child support.

This year was a challenging one with many long-time employees retiring and bringing on new staff to learn our complex public benefit programs. Even with this significant transition of staff, the department was able to effectively serve the public.

We continued to work on ways to improve customer service. We added an Information Center to the first floor of the Civic Center, completed a full year with JOBSplus! co-located in the Civic Center and Kochian Office Building and launched the Lobby Client Tracking System on the 2nd floor Civic Center at the very end of the year.

Finally, I want to thank the nearly 400 Department employees for their dedicated and professional service.

Sarah Merrick



HIGHLIGHTS:

- Temporary Assistance (TA) Intake processed **17,955** cases.
- TA Undercare supported **6,143** cases. (As of Dec. 2017)
- SNAP Intake processed **22,269** applications.
- SNAP Undercare supported **31,739** renewals.
- **2,675** Temporary Assistance clients entered employment.
- Child Support collected **\$45,746,288**, which is distributed to the custodial parent.
- **319** cases transitioned to Social Security resulting in **\$972,153** in local savings.
- **36,259** individuals received HEAP benefits.
- The call center addressed the needs of over **190,336** callers.
- Medicaid supported **31,992** cases insuring **34,893** individuals.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Department of Social Services-Economic Security is to accurately and efficiently administer economic support and services to county residents in a respectful manner where each person is treated fairly. Our staff is responsible for following state and federal guidelines for delivering appropriate assistance. The delivery of services will be conducted in a safe and supportive environment for members of our staff and the public. Our goal is to help people achieve their highest level of independence by providing quality service in a timely, efficient and dignified manner.

VALUES

The Department of Social Services-Economic Security has five core values that form the basis for the work the department does in fulfillment of its mission:

Confidentiality

- *Staff is dedicated to maintain and sustain confidentiality in order to protect all personal information.*

Team Work

- *Maximum results are achieved by a community of partners working together.*

Quality Service

- *Deliver service in a professional, knowledgeable, respectful and inclusive manner.*

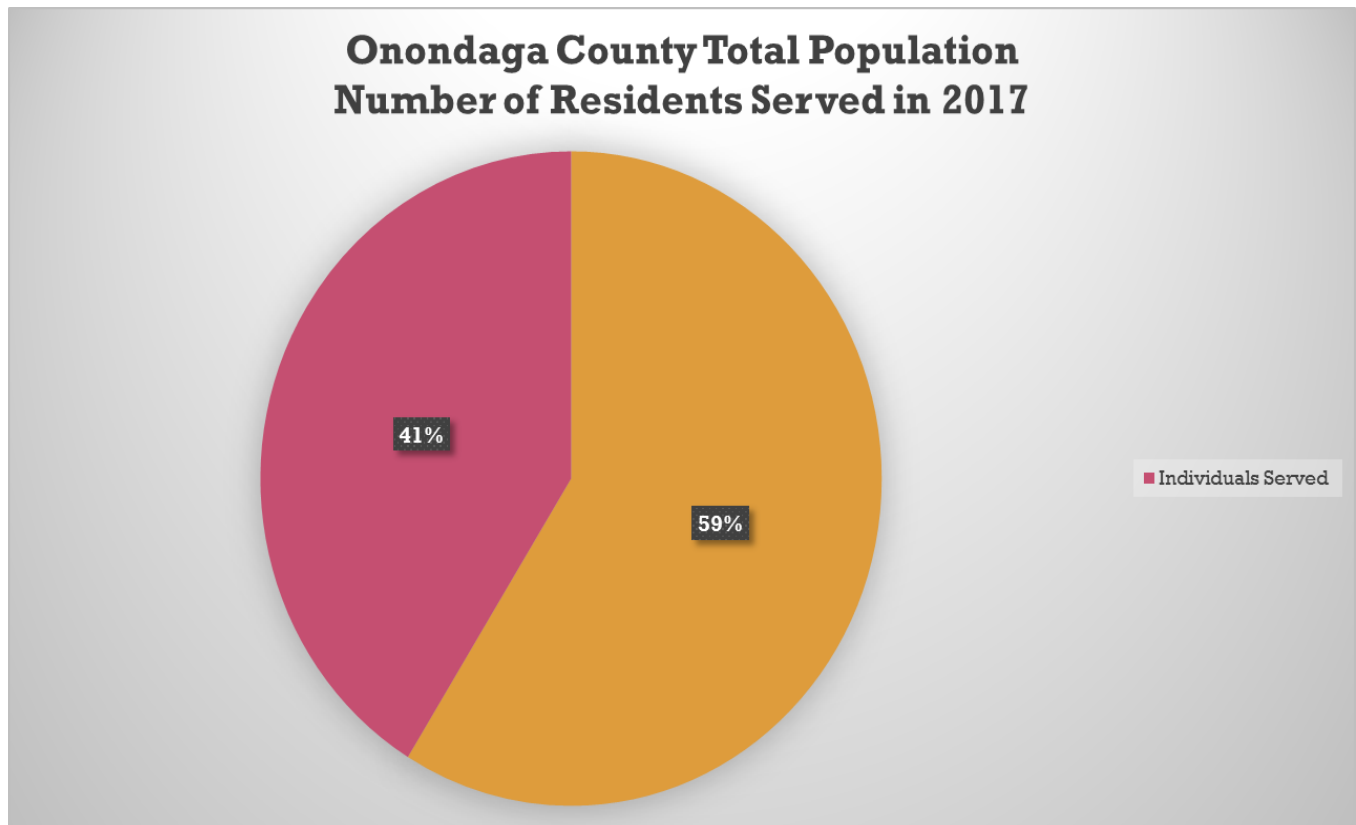
Commitment and Accountability

- *Be accurate, productive, efficient committed to public service and invested in one's job.*
- *Be open-minded, dedicated and cooperative.*

Communication

- *Communicate information appropriately, clearly, concisely and consistently.*

Unduplicated Individuals Served in 2017



Approximately 41% (**193,613 individuals**) of our County's population interacts with one or more of our programs.

LOBBY TRACKING SYSTEM

One of our exciting new innovations involves the use of portable carts to check in clients coming to our second floor location. Utilizing a “DMV style” system, clients can check in with a cart operator, be given a ticket, and be seated in a matter of a minute or 2. They watch a video board and listen for their number to be called and move to their next location quickly. This system has greatly reduced the amount of time clients spend in the waiting room, lessening stress on them, and on our workers. It has virtually eliminated the long lines that plagued our waiting room in the past.



Onondaga County, New York			ongov.net			James H. Watson County Executive			7:58:16 AM		
Now Serving			Overdue Calls, Report to Front Desk								
No.	Location	Time	No.	Location	Time						
154	Window B	7:52 am									
707	Window 6	7:51 am									
471	Window 6	7:51 am									
333	Window 7	7:51 am									
272	Window 1	7:51 am									
109	Window 1	7:51 am									
422	Window A	7:51 am									

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE(TA)

FAMILY ASSISTANCE (FA)

DSS-ES is the local administrative entity that provides cash assistance for needy families that include a minor child living with a parent or parents or a caretaker relative.

Under federal guidelines eligible needy families are **limited** to receiving benefits for a **total** of 60 months in their lifetime including months of assistance granted in other states.

FAMILY ASSISTANCE (FA) APPLICATION

- 2015 5,992
- 2016 5,032
- 2017 5,037

Once the 60 month limit is reached, the household is ineligible to receive any more federal FA benefits.

The months need not be consecutive, but rather each individual month FA benefits are received are included in the lifetime count. Parents and other adult relatives who can work must be seeking work, working or involved in work-like activities to receive FA assistance unless deemed unable to work due to a disability.

SAFETY NET ASSISTANCE (SNA)

SNA was established under the New York Welfare Reform act of 1997 to replace the Home Relief Program. SNA provides assistance to individuals and families who either do not qualify for the federal FA program, or whose FA benefits have run out.

Benefits are provided as cash for 24 months. After 24 months, benefits may continue as non-cash payments. (vouchers or payments made directly to vendors such as landlords.)

Those who are not eligible for other assistance programs may be eligible for SNA including:

- Single adults.
- Childless couples.
- Children living apart from any adult relative.
- Families of persons abusing drugs or alcohol.
- Families of persons refusing drug/alcohol screening, assessment or treatment.
- Families who have exceeded the 60 month limit on TANF.
- Individuals and families who are eligible for temporary assistance but who are not eligible for federal reimbursement.

SAFETY NET ASSISTANCE APPLICATIONS

- 2015 12,136
- 2016 10,629
- 2017 12,918

It is important to note that **ALL** FA and SNA applications go through the screening process which includes application review, interview in a group setting and interview with an eligibility worker. All FA and SNA applications are also considered for Medical Assistance (Medicaid) and Food Stamp (SNAP) benefits.

TA AVERAGE MONTHLY CASELOAD (FA+SNA)

- 2015 6,523
- 2016 6,628
- 2017 6,143

In 2017, **13,550** individuals were served.

MEDICAID

Medicaid provides assistance to Onondaga County residents who do not have the means to pay for medical care. Individuals who are eligible include those in receipt of SSI (Social Security Income), public assistance and those who meet New York State's eligibility criteria.

In October of 2013, with the opening of its Health Plan Marketplace, the State began the takeover of processing Medicaid applications and ongoing case maintenance as part of the Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare). The takeover effort is still ongoing.

MEDICAID APPLICATIONS (VIA DSS-ES)

- **2015** **11,192**
- **2016** **10,235**
- **2017** **8,850**

The state has taken responsibility for several types of applications and began in October of 2016 to take over the undercare (case maintenance) responsibility for active cases.

AVERAGE MONTHLY CASELOAD

- **2015** **46,107**
- **2016** **38,330**
- **2017** **31,992**

At the end of 2017, the Department carried **31,992** Medicaid cases insuring **34,893** individuals.

MEDICAID PAYS FOR THE FOLLOWING:

1. In-patient care in hospitals.
2. Out-patient care at hospitals.
3. Physician services.
4. Clinic services.
5. Pharmacy.
6. Skilled nursing home care and facility stays.
7. Long term home health care.
8. Personal Care aides.
9. Child teen health programs.
10. Mental health.
11. Family planning.
12. Medical and health insurance premiums.
13. Non-emergency medical transportation.
14. Assisted living programs.
15. Durable Medical Equipment.
16. Home re-modifications to accommodate needs of disabled children.



SNAP (FOOD STAMPS)

SNAP, which stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, aims to help low-income county residents buy healthy and nutritious food. Those receiving SNAP use an electronic benefit card and PIN (personal ID number) to access their benefits at the supermarket checkout the same way a debit card is used.

Most supermarkets throughout Onondaga County accept benefit cards. All TANF and SNA recipients receive SNAP benefits as part of their overall assistance grant.

SNAP APPLICATIONS

- 2015 23,443
- 2016 22,579
- 2017 21,269

SNAP CASES

- 2015 33,789
- 2016 32,419
- 2017 31,739



TOTAL INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING SNAP (DOES NOT INCLUDE TA CLIENTS WHO AUTOMATICALLY RECEIVE SNAP BENEFITS)

- 2015 62,400
- 2016 60,443
- 2017 58,696

It is important to note a couple of statistics:

1. Total number of people receiving SNAP benefits has risen a dramatic **75%** since 2007.
2. Currently, **12.5%** of all county residents receive SNAP benefits.

OTHER PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HEAP)

HEAP is a federally funded program designed to help low-income households meet the high cost of home energy. Those that pay separately for heating costs as well as those whose heat is included in their rent may be eligible for a one time regular benefit. Additionally, households with a heating emergency may also be eligible for an emergency benefit and /or heating equipment repair/replacement benefit. The HEAP year usually begins in mid-November and closes in mid-March or when the program funding is exhausted.

A cooling component to the program that assists medically needy households with the purchase of air conditioners is also available during the warmer months.

INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING HEAP PER HEATING SEASON

- **2015 37,192**
- **2016 34,535**
- **2017 36,259**

FUELS

Natural gas

Electricity

Oil/propane/kerosene

Coal

Wood/wood pellets

Corn

HEAP benefits are sent directly to the heat/utility vendor on record.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO ADULTS (EAA)

EAA provides assistance to individuals in receipt of Social Security Income who are facing emergency situations such as homelessness, utility or fuel emergencies or other items of critical need.

APPLICATIONS FOR ASSISTANCE (EAA)

- 2015 762
- 2016 763
- 2017 705

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES (EAF)

EAF provides assistance to families to meet emergency needs that are sudden, unforeseen and beyond their control. Such needs may include, but are not limited to, homelessness, fuel needs and utility shutoff. The household must include a minor child.

APPLICATIONS FOR ASSISTANCE (EAF)

- 2015 879
- 2016 904
- 2017 1,073

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

Child support services are available to any parent, guardian or caretaker of a child who meets the requirements. Filing for child support from non-custodial parents is part of the application process for Public Assistance and Medicaid. Applicants for, or recipients of, Public Assistance are automatically provided with support services unless otherwise indicated.

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT WORKS TO:

- Locate non-custodial parents
- Establish paternity for children by assisting both parents with the signing of a voluntary acknowledgement of paternity or through family court by filing petitions to establish paternity.
- Determine paternity through genetic marker or DNA testing.
- Obtain support orders from court including provisions for health care coverage.
- Enforce unpaid child support. All individuals obligated to pay child support are subject to any and all enforcement measures available.
- Review support orders for increased support based on cost of living adjustments.
- Modify child support orders based on changes in circumstances.

The above services may be applied to orders originating in other states and countries.

CHILD SUPPORT CASES COLLECTED ON

- **2015 13,623**
- **2016 13,377**
- **2017 12,628**

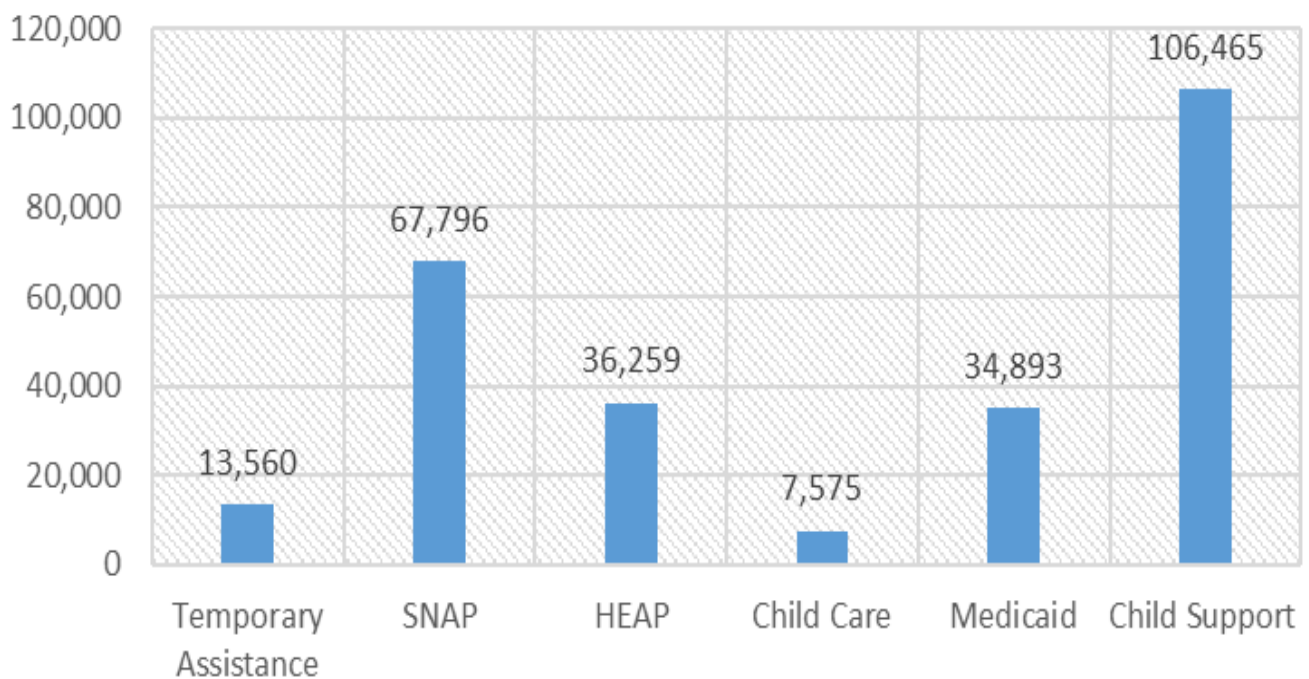
CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AMOUNT COLLECTED

- **2015 \$46,051,237**
- **2016 \$46,404,879**
- **2017 \$45,746,288**

OPEN CHILD SUPPORT CASES

- 2015 37,053
- 2016 36,945
- 2017 36,712

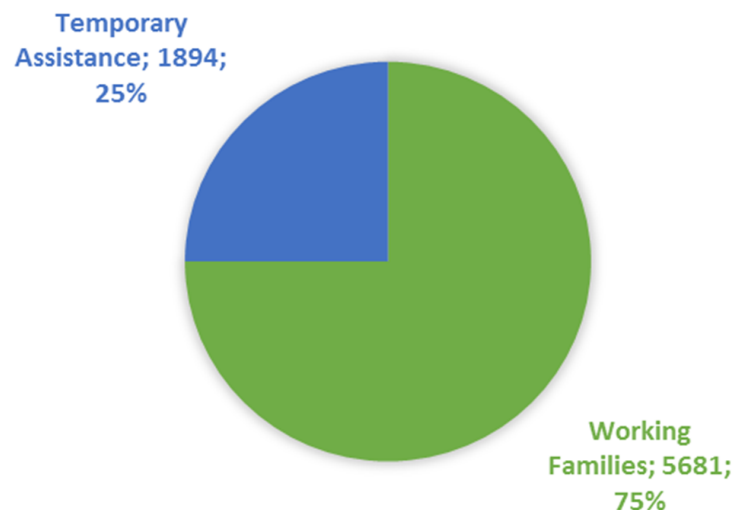
Clients Served By Program Area (Duplicated) - December 2017



SUBSIDIZED DAY CARE PROGRAM

DSS-ES provides funding to eligible working families in Onondaga County to help them pay for child care. Various kinds of child care are available throughout the county which accept DSS-ES subsidized funding.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN BENEFITING FROM CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES BY FAMILY TYPE IN 2017



In 2017, the Subsidized Day Care department continued to meet the mandate to expeditiously provide day care subsidies to eligible working families. Although the mandate is 30 days, the average number of days between application registration and disposition consistently remained below that number. Meeting this mandate is extremely important as it allows working families to obtain and retain employment.

NUMBER OF CHILD CARE CASES

- 2015 3,698
- 2016 3,396
- 2017 3,284

For 2017, 7,575 children were served.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

- People on Family Assistance seeking employment or newly employed.
- Employed individuals not receiving Family Assistance but who qualify on the basis of income.
- Parents who have a temporary incapacity and who are expected to return to work within a short period of time.
- Parents required to be absent from the home due to an emergency situation.
- Parents who are eligible recipients in child welfare cases.

ELIGIBILITY IS BASED ON:

- Gross Income.
- Family size.
- Resources are **NOT** counted.

FAMILY SHARE

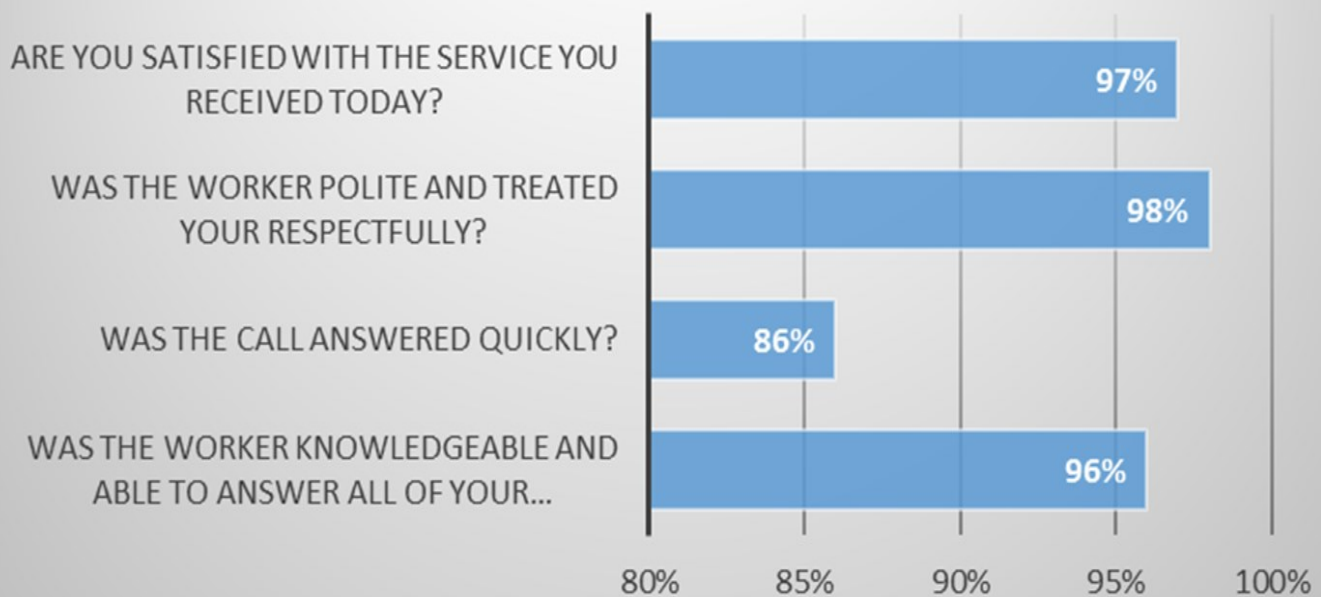
Low income subsidized child care requires that the parent pay a portion of child care expenses to the child care provider. The payment is called the Family Share, and will vary according to the family income.

Child care recipients must recertify every 6 to 12 months.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

- Bi- Annual ADA Survey
- Commissioner Complaint Form
- Case Review
- Fair Hearings
- Customer satisfaction Surveys-In person and Call Centers

Call Centers Survey Questions and Satisfaction Results



In all our call centers answered an amazing 190,336 calls in 2017!

EMPLOYMENT (JOBSplus!)

DSS-ES contracts with JOBSplus! to administer its temporary assistance employment program. The JOBSplus! staff works with the entire public assistance caseload, including those who are exempt from work requirements due to medical or mental health issues, excluding child-only cases.

PRIMARY OFFERINGS

- Full-time job search workshops for applicants.
- Individual assessment, case management and tracking.
- Unpaid work experience at public or not-for-profit sites.
- Structured, supervised job search.
- Computer skills training and English as a Second Language courses.
- Referral to and authorizations for support services (child care, transportation).

OUTCOMES (NUMBER EMPLOYED)

- **2015** **2,745**
- **2016** **2,568**
- **2017** **2,675**

MAJOR EMPLOYERS

Wal-Mart
Contemporary Personnel
Loretto
Sutherland Global Group
Van Duyn
Local fast food restaurants.
Staff Works
All Metro Health

FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS

The Fraud Investigations Unit at Social Services-Economic Security investigates all reported allegations of fraud in the TA, SNAP, Medicaid, HEAP and Day Care programs. The Unit also investigates cases involving both Day Care providers who receive payment from DSS-ES and businesses involved in food stamp trafficking.

During 2017, DSS-ES fraud investigators uncovered **\$958,954** in fraudulent or improper payments and recovered **\$1,144,489**, some of which came from repayment agreements from past years.

Additionally 1,957 of the completed investigations resulted in case closings and reductions. The total cost avoidance associated with investigations conducted in 2017 totaled **\$7,000,000**. The Department is required by law to refer cases where fraud has occurred to the District Attorney's office for possible prosecution.

WHAT WE LOOK FOR AND POTENTIALLY FRADULENT SITUATIONS THAT CAN BE REPORTED

- Unreported household income
- Hidden assets (bank accounts, property, etc.)
- Unreported changes in household composition (someone moved into or out of the home)
- Unreported changes in shelter costs/falsified shelter costs
- False parental custody
- Missing or wrong information about household residents

The public can report fraud by calling or visiting our local office, going to the County or DSS-ES websites, or visiting the OTDA website. Many of the cases we investigate come from tips from the public.

BURIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Burial Assistance Program assists families in need of providing a proper and dignified burial. 505 indigent burials were supported in 2017.

ELIGIBILITY IS BASED ON:

- Funds, other resources or insurance of deceased
- Persons legally responsible for support of the deceased, based on their ability to pay
- If there are no known relatives, friends or personal representatives liable or willing to become responsible for such expense.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications for the Onondaga County Burial Assistance program can be found at several funeral homes throughout the community or an appointment can be made with our Burial Assistance Division.

RECOVERIES

OVERPAYMENTS

By legislation and regulation, benefit of the doubt is given to the client as an inadvertent household error, but we are required to collect overpayments and in the case of fraud.

1. Types– Medicaid, Temporary Assistance, SNAP, HEAP, Daycare, and vendors.
2. Status-Both active and closed cases.
3. Collection Procedure:
 - Past due letter
 - Opportunity for repayment agreement/recoupment/payoff.
 - Two subsequent overdue notices.
 - Collections.

OTHER OVERPAYMENT COLLECTIONS

- Tax refund intercept (SNAP cases only)

OTHER REPAYMENTS (NOT RELATED TO OVERPAYMENTS)

- Interim TA reimbursement from lump sum award for SSI.
- Child Support when children in household are on TA, MA.
- Lottery intercept (TA)
- Personal Injury and Estate claims (TA)
- TA Mortgage liens
- MA Liens when homeowner goes into skilled nursing facility
- Irrevocable burial funds
- MA recovery at termination of supplemental needs trust

