

# **PROMISE initiative aims to provide better outcomes for kids on SSI**

The United States government recently announced a new initiative aimed at improving the long-term health, education and employment outcomes for children with disabilities who are currently receiving Supplemental Security Income.

The new initiative is known as Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income, or PROMISE. It will involve a coordination of efforts between the Social Security Administration and several other government organizations, including:

- The U.S. Department of Education
- The U.S. Department of Labor
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Through the PROMISE initiative, annual grants of up to \$10 million will be made available for up to five years to participating states. The funds will be used to promote improved coordination of health, educational and vocational services for SSI recipients between the ages of 14 and 16, and to increase participation in services already available. Objectives of the initiative include improving the lives of young SSI recipients and reducing their reliance on the program.

## **What is Supplemental Security Income?**

Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, is a program administered by the federal government to provide supplemental income to people who are unable to work as a result of mental or physical disabilities. SSI benefits are available to people who are not eligible to receive disability benefits through

the Social Security Disability Insurance program because they have little or no work history.

Unlike SSDI benefits, SSI benefits are funded by general tax revenues rather than Social Security taxes. In addition, SSI benefits are paid at a fixed amount, whereas SSDI benefits are based on how much the recipient paid into the Social Security system through payroll taxes prior to becoming disabled.

## **SSI benefits for children with disabilities**

More than one million children received SSI benefits in 2011, Disability Scoop reported. To qualify as a child for purposes of receiving SSI benefits, a blind or disabled person must be neither married nor the head of a household, and must be under the age of 18 unless he or she is a student. An applicant who attends school regularly may be considered a child until the age of 22.

Children who are eligible for SSI disability benefits may begin receiving benefits immediately upon birth. According to the SSA, child is considered "disabled" for purposes of SSI eligibility if both of the following conditions are met:

- The child has one or more medically determinable impairments, whether mental or physical, that result in "marked and severe functional limitations;" and
- The impairment or impairments have lasted or are expected to last for at least one year or are expected to result in the child's death.

Parents and families of disabled children are encouraged to speak with a knowledgeable disability attorney in their area to learn about SSI and other disability benefits that may be available to them. A knowledgeable attorney can help families explore their options and guide them through the complicated benefits application process. For families who have already

had an initial application for benefits denied, a lawyer can be a powerful advocate during the appeals process, and in many cases can help applicants obtain the benefits that were initially denied to them.