

Address Confidentiality for Domestic Violence Victims

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Summary

The Connecticut legislature established an address confidentiality program within the Secretary of the State's Office (SOTS) in 2003 (effective January 2004) to protect victims of certain crimes, such as domestic violence ([PA 03-200](#), codified at [CGS § 54-240 et seq.](#)). The program has since been amended to extend its protections to additional victims.

The program provides a substitute mailing address (i.e., the program address) to certain crime victims who, for safety reasons, wish to keep their residential address (as well as their work or school address) confidential. The program was initially available to family violence, stalking, and sexual assault victims and victims of injury or risk of injury to a minor.

Implementing Regulations

The regulations SOTS adopted to implement and administer the program are available here: [Conn. Agencies Regs. § 54-240a-1 et seq.](#)

In 2022, the legislature expanded the program by allowing the following individuals to also participate:

1. victims of (a) 1st or 2nd degree kidnapping, (b) 1st or 2nd degree kidnapping with a firearm, or (c) human trafficking;
2. victims of child abuse or neglect that was substantiated by the Department of Children and Families and the basis for issuing a restraining order or civil protection order; and
3. children who are the subject of petitions to terminate parental rights granted by the court ([PA 22-87](#), §§ 9 & 10).

By law, once an applicant to the address confidentiality program is certified by SOTS, he or she receives a substitute address. SOTS, as the participant's legal agent, receives any mail and service of process sent to that substitute address and forwards it to the participant's confidential address free-of-charge. Participants may generally have (1) their street address omitted from voter registries, (2) correspondence from public agencies sent to their substitute address, and (3) their marriage records kept confidential. Participants may renew their certification every four years. SOTS may cancel a participant's certification under certain circumstances, but the participants may reapply at any time.

The law requires public agencies to accept participants' program address in place of their actual residential address, unless the agency has received an exemption from SOTS. Additionally, certain agency employees or other witnesses must not be compelled to disclose a program participant's confidential address in any criminal or civil proceeding, unless the court finds that nondisclosure would prejudice a party.

Address Confidentiality Program

Program Application and Certification

Eligible adults, guardians or conservators of eligible adults, or parents or guardians of eligible minors may file a program application with SOTS. The secretary of the state must approve properly filed applications and certify applicants as program participants by issuing each of them a certification card with specified information. Each certification lasts four years from the date the card is issued, unless it is withdrawn or invalidated sooner (see *Certification Cancellation and Program Withdrawal* below) ([CGS § 54-240b](#) to [-240d](#)).

An application assistant helps people apply for the program. A current list of the organizations that provide these services is available on the SOTS [website](#).

An application must include:

1. the applicant's sworn statement that he or she, or the person on behalf of whom the application is completed, (a) meets the eligibility criteria listed above (i.e., was a victim of certain crimes, a victim of child abuse or neglect under certain conditions, or was the subject of a petition for the termination of parental rights granted by the court) and (b) fears for the applicant's safety, their children's safety, or the safety of the person (or the person's children) on whose behalf the application was filed;
2. documents supporting this statement;

3. a designation of the secretary of the state as the agent for service of process and receipt of mail;
4. the residential, work, and school addresses in the state, and any telephone numbers, that will remain confidential under the program but which the secretary can use to contact the person; and
5. the applicant's and assistant's signatures on the dated application ([CGS § 54-240c](#)).

Certification Renewal

The law permits program participants or certain people acting on their behalf to renew the certification by filing with the secretary their current certification card, a properly completed renewal form, and a new certification card form.

The secretary must certify program participants who properly complete the renewal form for four more years and issue a new certification card with the new date ([CGS § 54-240j](#)).

Program Address and Mail Delivery

The law requires the secretary to designate a post office box number and fictitious street address as the address of program participants. She must maintain the box for the program's exclusive use. She must get the mail from the box on weekdays, excluding state holidays, and send it, on the day of receipt, to the participant by first class mail. The secretary cannot open the mail before forwarding it ([CGS § 54-240e](#)).

Agency Use of Designated Address

Program participants may present their certification cards and request that state and local agency records show the designated program address as their actual home, work, or school address. Agency officials may make a copy of the card for their records and must then immediately return the original to the participant.

When creating a new record, each of these agencies must accept the designated address unless the secretary grants the agency an exemption ([CGS § 54-240h](#)).

Agency Exemption From Program Address Requirement

Under the law, a public agency may ask the secretary, in writing, to exempt it from the requirement to substitute the program's address for a participant's actual addresses. The request must:

1. identify the agency's legal authority for requesting the confidential address,
2. state that the address will be used only for these legal purposes,
3. identify the program participant whose confidential address is requested,
4. identify the people who will have access to the address, and
5. explain how substituting the program address for the participant's confidential address would prevent the agency from meeting its legal obligation and why internal procedural changes would not solve the problem.

The law requires the secretary to determine if the agency has a legal requirement to use the confidential address. If she does not find one, she must issue a written denial of the request and include her reasons.

If she finds a legal requirement and is satisfied that the agency will use the address solely for this reason, she must notify the program participant of the exemption, including the agency's name and the reason, and then issue a written exemption. She may include in the exemption:

1. the agency's duty to keep the address confidential,
2. limitations on how the address may be used and who has access to it,
3. the length of the exemption,
4. a designated record format for maintaining the address,
5. how long the agency can maintain the record with the address, and
6. any other provisions and qualifications she deems appropriate.

An agency that receives an exemption can disclose the address only to the people listed in the request, unless otherwise directed by a court order.

The secretary must at least partially base her decision to grant or deny the exemption on the information provided by the agency. During her review and evaluation (and appeal, if applicable) of the exemption request, the agency must use the program participant's program address. The secretary's action is immediately appealable ([CGS § 54-240i](#)).

Certification Cancellation

The law permits the secretary to cancel participants' certification and invalidate their cards if:

1. they do not give her 30 days' written notice after a name or address change,
2. mail forwarded to them is returned as undeliverable,
3. they do not apply for renewal before the certificate expires, or
4. they provided false information in their program application.

The secretary must send written cancellation notices, including the reason for them, to participants at the confidential address shown in her records. The law gives participants 30 days from the date the secretary mailed the notice to appeal. They can reapply to the program again at any time.

The secretary must notify appropriate authorized agency personnel when she cancels a participant's certification. After receiving notice, the agency is not responsible for keeping the person's record or address confidential ([CGS § 54-240k](#)).

Program Withdrawal

The law allows participants to withdraw from the program by giving the secretary written notice of their intention and their current certification card. The secretary must cancel the certification as of the date she receives this information ([CGS § 54-240k\(e\)](#)).

Marriage and Voter Registry Lists

The law permits participants to present their certification card and ask the (1) registrar of vital statistics in the town where they either married or plan to marry to keep the marriage records confidential or (2) registrar of voters in the town where they are qualified to vote to have their name printed on the voter registry list without a street and house address. An applicant seeking to keep marriage records confidential must appear in person along with the person's spouse or intended spouse.

When asked, the registrars must keep the records confidential, except if (1) requested by the attorney general, chief state's attorney, State Police, or a local police department or (2) directed by a court order to release them to people named in the order ([CGS § 54-240f](#) and [-240g](#)).

The secretary must give the registrars written notice if she cancels a participant's certification ([CGS § 54-240k](#)).

Permissible Disclosures

The law prohibits the secretary from disclosing anything from a participant's file other than the program address, except she may:

1. give the attorney general, chief state's attorney, State Police, a local police department, or the State Elections Enforcement Commission information requested in writing on agency letterhead, signed by the agency head, and that contains the request date and program participant's name;
2. release information to a named person, as directed by a court order;
3. confirm information a requestor supplies to verify a participant's program status; and
4. disclose information when she cancels a participant's certification ([CGS § 54-240m\(a\)](#)).

The secretary must notify a participant right away when she is asked to disclose verification or court-ordered information ([CGS § 54-240m\(b\)](#)).

Under the law, employees of the attorney general, chief state's attorney, State Police, local police departments, state or municipal social service agencies, and other witnesses cannot be compelled to disclose a participant's confidential address during criminal or civil discovery or trial, unless the court finds that nondisclosure might prejudice a party to the proceeding ([CGS § 54-240n](#)).

Service of Process

The law makes the secretary of the state the program participant's agent for service of process in any action, proceeding, or any other matter involving the program participant.

By law, the State Marshal Commission must create a list of program participants, refer to it to determine if an intended process recipient is a participant, and verify the participation before serving process on the secretary of the state. The secretary must give the commission's chair the participants' names. Service by mail must be marked "Address Confidentiality Program" ([CGS § 54-240l](#)).

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