



Amanda Murtagh
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Tēnā koe Amanda Murtagh

On 10 August 2021, you contacted the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) through the FYI website requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Under what circumstance does an MSD client incur a "My Debt" for an essential service where MSD commence recovering the said debt by repayments from the client, prior to making the payment to the approved supplier for the essential service?*

On 26 August 2021, the Ministry emailed you to clarify what you were referring to by "My Debt" to ensure the Ministry was providing you with the correct information.

On the same day, you replied to the Ministry stating that "My Debt" is a menu option through the my.msd.govt.nz/debt website.

In terms of hardship assistance, debt is established as soon as the payment is approved in the system. The provider should receive the money immediately and has no relation to whether the item is an 'essential service'.

There may be circumstances in which a client may not have received an item or service before the debt begins repayment. For example, when a client receives assistance for whiteware, the grant will be approved, provider paid, and the debt starts being recovered, though it may be some time before the client receives the item.

Other situations where payments may differ from when they are on a client's file are a natural disaster, or when the system is down. In both these situations the Ministry may make payments via Hologram letter rather than through the system. However, in both these situations, the client would receive the items before the supplier may be paid. The Hologram letter is given to the supplier as a sign of good faith that payment for the goods or services will be made.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted, and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding debt repayment, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

Bridget Saunders

Bridget Saunders
**Manager, Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**