



Address Confidentiality Program Participant Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

The Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) was created by the 2005 legislature as HB 285 and codified under [Title 40 Chapter 15 Part 1 of the Montana Code Annotated \(MCA\)](#). The ACP is administered by the

Montana Attorney General's Office and exists to help survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, stalking, or individuals eligible for an order of protection to stay safe from further harm.

The ACP provides two services:

1. A substitute address for you to use instead of your home address.
2. Mail forwarding for all First-Class mail that is sent to you at the substitute address.

Now that you have enrolled in the ACP, you can begin using these services. Any existing records containing your address will not be updated automatically; it is up to you to make sure that all the appropriate records are up to date with the substitute address. This handbook can provide guidance on how to make these changes.

Please remember – you share the substitute address with many other participants. There may be other people enrolled with similar names. It is essential that every piece of mail the ACP receives on your behalf has your private mailbox (PMB) number included in the address so that we can forward the correct mail to each participant. Your assigned PMB number can be found on your ACP card and in the welcome letter you received. When a household applies to the ACP together, each member will share the same PMB number.

The information provided in this handbook is not legal advice. All legal questions should be directed to an attorney or legal advocate. The information included in this handbook is subject to change.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Enrolling in the ACP does not protect all your information. Your participation in the ACP is NOT confidential, and if asked, the ACP will verify that you are enrolled and that the substitute address is your legal address.

The ACP may release your home address and phone number if a judge orders the program to do so or if a law enforcement agency requests it. For more information, please refer to [40-15-118\(2\), MCA](#) .

THINGS TO KNOW

1. Government agencies often share information. If you give personal information, including your home address, to a local or state government agency, that agency does not have to and likely will not keep that information confidential from other government agencies. For example, law enforcement agencies and court systems routinely share information, including addresses, to operate efficiently.
2. Filing a Change of Address with the U.S. Postal Service will add your name and new address to a national database that is widely distributed and easily accessible. Even filing a Change of Address with the substitute address is not recommended, as it clearly highlights that you are residing in Montana.
3. To ensure that state and local government agencies accept and use the substitute address, you must be prepared to let them know that you are enrolled in the ACP and show them your ACP

card. You should also expect that they will want to make a photocopy of your ACP card to put on file.

4. Private businesses are not required to accept the substitute address. However, most businesses are willing to use the substitute address if you help them to understand that your enrollment in the ACP is to protect yourself from harm. Most transactions with private businesses do not require a home address, and in such situations, you should always try to use the substitute address with your assigned PMB number.
 - If the transaction you have undertaken with a private business is one that requires your home address (financing a car, setting up utilities, getting internet service, etc.), consider asking if the company can keep your address confidential. If they say “yes”, you should ask about how they will keep the information confidential and how many people will have access to the confidential information.
 - You may decide not to give out your home address until you are satisfied with a company’s process for keeping your address confidential, and don’t hesitate to shop around for a business that can help keep you safe.
 - Some businesses sell information about customers to third-party data collectors. Third-party data is collected and bought by companies or brands for their marketing campaigns. With more information about customers, companies can better target an audience through direct mail, print media, radio, television, email, social media, and digital marketing. If you provide your actual home address to a private business, it may become easy for anyone to find.
5. Federal government agencies are also not required to accept the substitute address issued by the ACP, as it is a state administered program. When interacting with a federal government agency (Social Security Administration, United States Postal Service, State Department, Internal Revenue Service, etc.) you may treat it similarly to how you would when interacting with a private business. Although it is not required by federal law, many federal agencies will accept the substitute address if you help them understand that it will keep you safe. Always ask if you can use the substitute address and have conversations about how information you provide will be stored and who can access that information. If you or a federal government employee have questions about the ACP or using your substitute address, contact the ACP for guidance.

CONTACT THE ACP

Please contact the ACP with any questions about using the substitute address or mail forwarding.

Telephone:

Montana: (406) 444-3653

Toll free: 1-800-498-6455

ACP staff are in the office from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday – Friday. If no one is available, please leave a clear message with your name, phone number, and whether ACP may leave a voicemail at the number provided.

Fax: (406) 444-5335

This is not a secure fax machine; if you have privacy concerns, please find another way to send information.

Email: DOJDCIACP@mt.gov

Please be cautious when using email; it is not guaranteed as a secure means of communication. Please think twice before sending anything containing your address or other protected information by email.

Mailing Address: Address Confidentiality Program
Office of Victim Services
PO Box 201410
Helena, MT 59620-1410

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ADDRESS

Now that you are enrolled in ACP, you have multiple addresses. Use these terms to avoid confusion:

1. Substitute Address

Your substitute address is the address assigned to you by the ACP. Each participant is assigned a unique Private Mailbox (PMB) number so that mail received can be sorted appropriately. The substitute address and your PMB number is printed on the ACP card that you were issued. This is your legal address and must be accepted by all state and local governments, according to [40-15-121, MCA](#). Always keep your ACP card with you so that you may show it to anyone who requests your address.

2. Home/Residential Address

This is where you live. The purpose of the ACP is to keep your home address from becoming part of any public records. You should **always** use the substitute address in place of your home address when someone asks for your address. The ACP must always have a home address of file for each participant, even if it is temporary such as a shelter, hotel, or friend's house. You may update the home address on file as often as you need to, but you are required by [40-15-119, MCA](#), to notify the ACP of changes within 48 hours of moving. If you are ever in doubt about providing your home/residential address to any person or agency, call the ACP for guidance. If you have already given your home address to a business or government agency, you should contact them and update their records with the substitute address immediately.

3. Mailing Address

Your mailing address is where the ACP will send your mail. It may be your home address, a PO box, a friend's house, or any safe location that works for you. The ACP will send your mail to the home address on file unless you provide us with a different address for mail. You can add or change a mailing address any time by submitting an ACP "Change Form".

NOTE: The United States Postal Service (USPS) may release the information you provide on a PO Box application (including your home address) to a variety of agencies and businesses. If you apply for a PO Box, use the substitute address you were issued instead of your home address. More information can be found at: <https://faq.usps.com/s/article/PO-Box-The-Basics>

PUBLIC RECORDS

The purpose of the ACP is to keep the home address of a participant from becoming part of any public record.

In Montana, nearly every interaction that a person has with a government agency at the state, county, or city level generates a record that can be easily accessed by any member of the public. Often, these public records include an address for the person seeking services. It is important for you to keep this in mind whenever you are interacting with a government agency, including (but not limited to):

- The Department of Public Health and Human Services and Office of Public Assistance
- Motor Vehicle Division for licensing, vehicle registration, and disability placards
- County Elections Offices when registering to vote
- Public Schools
- Courts
- State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies

Whenever you are seeking help from a government agency, you should ask questions about how your information will be stored if you provide it and who will have access to that information. Do not feel obligated to explain in detail why you don't want to provide your home address, but you should be ready to make it clear that it is a matter of safety, and you should display your ACP card when someone asks for an address.

In every situation that requires you to provide information about yourself, you should feel empowered to make the decision that will help you stay safe.

If you or a government agency have questions about transactions with government agencies, please contact the ACP administrator.

OFFICE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE (OPA)

When applying for services from the Office of Public Assistance (SNAP, TANF) after enrolling in the ACP, you may use the substitute address as shown on your ACP card. OPA may not require a residential

address on the application, only a mailing address. You should use the address on your ACP card, making sure to include your PMB number.

Although you may seek services from any OPA field office and use the Helena address that is shown on your ACP card, you may experience some confusion. This is because OPA employees are likely to expect you to live close to the office that you are visiting, and some counties have special rules when offering services. To help make the transaction easier,

- You should bring with you the ACP “Welcome Letter” you received when you enrolled.
- Be prepared to use that letter to verify where you reside so that you may receive the proper services from OPA.
- Make sure that OPA uses your substitute address when processing your application and for all correspondence.
- Do not provide your home address.

If you or someone at OPA has questions about what to do, call the ACP for guidance.

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION (CSSD)

As an ACP participant, you may use your substitute address if you seek the services of the Child Support Services Division. CSSD may not need a residential address for you as an applicant and may serve you from anywhere in the state. The case workers at CSSD are used to working with applicants that have safety concerns, so you should feel empowered to make sure they know you need their help staying safe. Much of the work CSSD does is legal in nature, so you may end up involved in a court action or a hearing if you apply for their services. Be aware: hearings and court appearances are typically where residential information is identified or shared. Talk to your CSSD case worker about your concerns at every step and contact the ACP if you have questions.

LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIEAP)

LIEAP pays a portion of winter utility bills for eligible people. You may qualify for LIEAP if you receive SNAP or TANF benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or if you are unemployed. When you apply for this program through your regional office, you must provide your legal name, home address, Social Security Number, and Date of Birth. LIEAP needs your home address so they can pay the utility company who provides service to your home, and they need your other personal information to verify your eligibility. LIEAP offices do not release recipient information to the public, and they are careful with the storage of recipient records containing private information. However, it is important to decide if you feel comfortable providing all your sensitive information, including your home address, to the LIEAP office to receive services. The LIEAP application and requirements are available online.

MOTOR VEHICLE DIVISION (MVD)

LICENSING

After enrolling in the ACP, you may follow MVD procedures for obtaining a driver license, state ID, and/or disability placard using the substitute address you have been issued. This is one of the first things you

should do after enrolling in the ACP. Use the substitute address on the application you complete and use your ACP card to demonstrate your enrollment in the program when you meet with an examiner. Make sure to required that MVD use the substitute address on your ACP card (exactly as it is shown) when putting an address on a license or ID.

Having your driver license or state ID reflect your substitute address will make using the substitute address easier in other situations.

VEHICLE TITLES & REGISTRATIONS

To update your vehicle record with your substitute address, you must visit a county motor vehicle office (County Treasurer) in the county where you live. You should use the substitute address as it is shown on your ACP card when you interact with the county for registration and titling purposes. Use your ACP card to demonstrate your enrollment in the program. You will need to verify your county of residence for this transaction, which you can do using the “Welcome Letter” you were provided when you enrolled. If necessary, the county officer can contact the ACP administrator with questions or for verification of your participation in the program. Once you are enrolled in the ACP, you should update your vehicle records with the County Treasurer so that your title, registration, and driver license all match by showing the substitute address with your PMB number. If you buy a car at a dealership and they complete the titling and registration process for you, make sure they know to use the address that is shown on your ACP card. You should also provide them with a copy of your “Welcome Letter” to send to the County Treasurer and up-to-date contact information so that the county may contact you if necessary.

INTERACTING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

There are many reasons that you may need to contact law enforcement, and as a participant in the ACP it is important to know how to navigate these situations. ACP staff works to make sure that police officers and deputy sheriffs are educated about the ACP, but there is a chance that some officers you encounter may not be aware of the ACP. You may consider informing the law enforcement officer about your ACP enrollment and card.

CALLING POLICE TO YOUR HOME

You may find yourself needing police assistance at your home. In the event of an emergency, you should always call for help. Please expect that you will be asked for your address and that it will become part of the dispatch record. Once help arrives, you can show your ACP card and request that your substitute address be used in any reports that could be released. Following the event, you should also contact the record’s department for the agency that responded to your home and request (or verify) that your residential address is not contained in a releasable record. For your safety, you should assume that any contact you have with police will be recorded and that the record will be released to the public if it is requested.

NON-EMERGENCY POLICE REPORTS

If you need to report an incident to police that did not occur at your home, you can call police to the scene of the crime or accident, or you can go to the law enforcement agency in the appropriate jurisdiction and meet with an officer. When a law enforcement writes an incident report using information you have provided, he or she will likely want to include your address along with the location of the incident. Show

your ACP card and explain that you are enrolled in the ACP and request that the officer use the substitute address printed on the card. Encourage the police officer or deputy sheriff to call the ACP staff if they have questions about the card or how to use it.

TRAFFIC STOPS

The first thing you should do when enrolling in the ACP is to get a new driver's license that shows your substitute address. A police officer may ask questions about the address. If that happens, show your ACP card and explain that you are enrolled in the ACP and have been issued a substitute address to help keep you safe.

RECORDS

Every law enforcement agency has a records department. If you have an encounter with law enforcement, you should contact the records department as soon as you can and ask them to make sure that your home address is not used in any reports that may be released. Instead, they can use your substitute address. The records department can also explain which records may be released and who determines whether a record will be released – often the county or city attorney. Sometimes, there will be multiple agencies or private businesses that have reports related to an event, depending on the circumstances and where the event occurred. The records department may be able to tell you who else to contact in order to maintain your privacy and the confidentiality of your home address if it was included in a report.

RELEASE OF PARTICIPANT ADDRESS INFORMATION

According to [40-15-118, MCA](#) and [Administrative Rule of Montana 23.15.504](#), ACP staff must provide a participant's name and confidential address to law enforcement if it is requested.

INTERACTING WITH THE COURT SYSTEM

When you interact with any court in Montana, they will need to make sure they have jurisdiction over you and your case. Jurisdiction is determined by the type of issue that an individual brings to the court as well as where the issue is occurring geographically. Use the "Welcome Letter" and your ACP card to prove that you are enrolled in the ACP and live in the county where you are seeking services. On any documentation the court requests, you may use your substitute address as shown on your ACP card. If the court needs further information from you to make sure that they have jurisdiction, work with the Clerk of Court to figure out how you can provide the necessary information without it becoming part of a public record. You or the Clerk of Court may contact the ACP with questions.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

When moving to a new school district, a child's school records must accompany them from their previous school. When the new school district requests records from the child's most recent school, the request is made electronically, and the previous school is notified of where the child will be attending school next. This might be a problem for ACP participants concerned about giving away their location to employees of the school district where their child/children were last enrolled. If you have a child who will be attending school in a new district after you have enrolled in the ACP and you are concerned about the new school

district contacting your child's last school for records, please talk to the new school district about the ACP and your participation in ACP.

MAIL FORWARDING

The Address Confidentiality Program is required to forward First-Class mail address to program participants, according to [Montana Administrative Rule 23.15.503](#). First-class mail examples include but not limited to:

- handwritten or typewritten material,
- bills,
- statements of account or invoices,
- credit cards,
- personal correspondence, or
- personalized business correspondence.

First-class mail is clearly marked and will be sent by the ACP to the intended recipient as soon as possible. The ACP will forward license plates to participants.

Mail that the ACP is not required to forward (though may as resources allow) includes standard mail, periodical class mail, marketing mail, and non-profit mail. Examples of these types of mail are catalogs, flyers, booklets, or advertisements; periodicals (newspapers, magazines, trade publications, newsletters); packages of any mail class (including prescription medications); mail from non-profit organizations; and free samples of merchandise.

SERVICE TIME

The ACP forwards mail every weekday except for holidays. If staff members are unexpectedly away from the office, every effort will be made to avoid delays. In general, mail received on your behalf by the ACP and forwarded to you will only be delayed by one to two business days.

RETURNED MAIL

Occasionally, participant mail is returned to the ACP as "undeliverable". When this happens, ACP staff will hold your mail and try to contact you. If we are unable to contact you within thirty days of receiving returned mail sent to your address on file, your mail will be returned to the original sender and your enrollment in the program will be terminated. The ACP must always have a valid phone number where you can be reached.

If you have moved, you must notify the ACP within 48 hours. If we are not made aware of your new address, even if it is temporary, your enrollment may be cancelled, according to [40-15-119, MCA](#).

MAIL HOLDS

The ACP can hold your mail for up to 30 days. If you plan to travel, move to temporary housing, or you no longer have a safe place to receive mail, please contact the ACP and we will hold your mail. If you request to have your mail held, please provide an update before the 30 days has passed. Otherwise, your mail will be returned to the original sender and your participation in the program will be canceled.

SAFE LABEL NAME / ALIAS

You may consider using an alias or a “safe label” name when receiving mail from the ACP. A safe label name is a name other than yours that the ACP can address your mail to. This helps prevent a connection being made between your real name and your home address. It is important to understand that a safe label name is fake and is not to be used for any legal purpose. It is suggested that if you adopt a safe label name, you place a label with that name inside your mailbox so the mail carrier will know to deliver mail in that name to your address.

PACKAGES

According to the USPS, any item that has any dimension larger than 12 inches wide, 15 inches long, $\frac{3}{4}$ inches thick, or over 13 ounces in weight is considered a package. For example, if you order a gift card and it is delivered to the ACP in a regular envelope, the ACP can forward it to you. If the gift card is shipped in a small box that is 1 inch thick, the ACP cannot forward it because the box size makes it a package. If you are unsure about whether something is a package, check out the USPS website at: <https://www.usps.com/ship/can-you-ship-it.htm>.

Here are some suggestions for receiving packages:

- Order online items using a pre-paid credit card or gift card with an alias name.
- Have packages sent to your actual address in the alias name.
- Send online purchases to a retail store for pick-up (site-to-store option).
- Use your ACP substitute address to rent a Post Office box and use the Post Office’s street address for package delivery.
- Have packages sent to a friend, relative, or place of employment.
- Have packages sent to a post office via “General Delivery”.
- Ask if you can have prescriptions or medical devices sent to your doctor’s office for you to pick up.
- Suggest gift cards as presents.

Aside from license plates, the ACP cannot forward packages to participants.

LEGAL MAIL/PERSONAL SERVICE OF PROCESS

By enrolling in the ACP, you have designated the ACP to act as your agent for receiving legal mail and subpoenas or summons. This means that if you are involved in a court action, the ACP can receive documents on your behalf so that you do not need to disclose your home address to the court. The ACP

can only accept personal service in your legal name. You are responsible for complying with the requirements contained in the legal document(s). If the ACP receives legal mail on your behalf, the ACP will attempt to notify you by telephone and then forward the document to you by mail. Please make sure that the ACP has your most up to date contact information.

UPDATING THE ACP

When you get a new phone number, move to a new home, change your mailing address, add someone to your household, or make other changes that affect the service the ACP provides, please notify the ACP and update your record. If you fail to update the ACP with your contact information, where your mail needs to go, or who may be receiving mail with your PMB number, it could interrupt your service and possibly lead to termination of your participation. Call the ACP at (406) 444-3653 or 1-800-498-6455 or email DOJDCIACP@mt.gov to update your information.

RENEWAL AND CANCELATION

Participants are enrolled in the ACP for a period of four years. The valid dates of enrollment can be found on the ACP card that is mailed to you upon enrollment. If you wish to continue to participate in the program for longer than four years, a renewal application must be submitted. The application can be found online at <https://dojmt.gov/victims/address-confidentiality-program/> or by contacting the ACP.

If you wish to cancel your enrollment in the ACP, please use the application form and write “cancel” or “disenroll” in the blank space at the top. Submit the application to the ACP along with a current address so that we may mail you a letter confirming that you have been removed from the program.

If you are cancelling your participation because you plan to move, please contact the ACP ahead of time. Many states have similar programs, and the ACP staff can help you establish participation in another confidential address program before you are removed from the Montana ACP.

NOTE: The Office of Victim Services may cancel your participation in the ACP at any time if you move and fail to notify us within 48 hours, or if it is determined that you knowingly provided false or incorrect information on your application.

If ACP staff suspect that your address has changed, and we are unable to contact you, your participation in the program will be terminated and future mail will be returned to the sender. Please make sure that the ACP has up-to-date contact information for you; if your mail is returned to the ACP as undeliverable, we must be able to contact you and resolve the issue.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR SAFETY AND PRIVACY

- Consider a security freeze. With a security freeze in place, no one can access your credit information without your permission. Credit bureaus collect a lot of identifying information (name, date of birth, Social Security Number) along with information about your credit history.

- Contact the Montana Office of Consumer Protection for more information about implementing a security freeze: 406-444-4500 | contactocp@mt.gov | <https://www.dojmt.gov/consumer>.
- Seek expert advice about keeping your technology secure. The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) offer excellent resources through the Safety Net Project. Visit their website: <https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivor/facebook>.
- Use a search engine (e.g. Google) to search for your name. If your home address is included in any of the search results, you can contact the website and request that they remove your information from their records.
- Cadastral property info -

You may use the form located at <https://svc.mt.gov/dor/property> to request they remove your name from the [Property.MT.gov](https://www.property.mt.gov) and [Montana Cadastral](https://www.montana-cadastral.com) web applications. The Montana Department of Revenue's property database includes property information such as owner name, physical address, and geocode. This information is available to the public in the [Property.MT.gov](https://www.property.mt.gov) and [Montana Cadastral](https://www.montana-cadastral.com) web applications, You may request your name be removed from both web applications if showing your name puts you at risk of physical harm or threatens your personal safety.