

Office of Inspector General City of Jacksonville, Florida



Management Review Social Services Department Food Assistance Program 2025-0089

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Inspector General

Executive Summary

In August 2025, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) launched a review of the Emergency Assistance Program, managed by the Social Services Department, with a specific focus on financial aid for food. The assistance is provided through Winn-Dixie gift cards ranging from \$25.00 to \$50.00. This was a limited-scope review that examined whether recipients receiving food assistance through the Social Services Department are complying with the Food Card Use Agreement they signed.

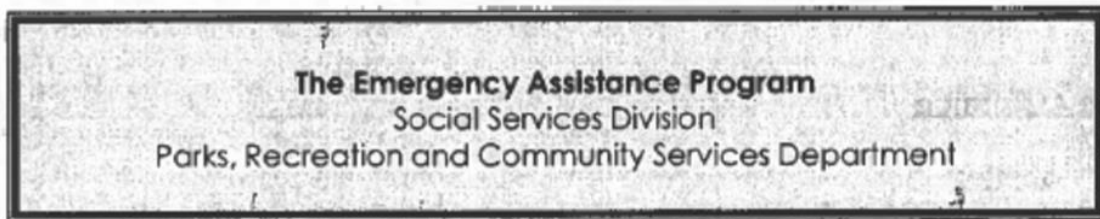
The OIG asked the Social Services Department to provide the number of recipients who received food assistance from October 2023 to August 2025, which showed that 60 recipients received help during that time.

The number of gift card recipients received varied significantly, with some getting as few as two and others receiving six or more.

The OIG did not find significant abuse occurring in the Emergency Assistance Program related to financial assistance for food. However, the OIG identified opportunities to improve program efficiency.

Background and Governing Directives

According to the Social Services Division Emergency Assistance Program:



Scope of Service

The Emergency Assistance Program addresses the basic shelter and utility needs of Duval County residents who find themselves facing adverse hardships due to loss of employment or household income, low wages, physical or mental health challenges, catastrophic illness, abandonment/displacement, fire/disaster, or other unanticipated circumstances and emergencies. Intervention by the City is for purpose of preventing homelessness.

Type Assistance

Food

Financial assistance with food is offered as an ancillary service while the client makes an application with the Florida Department of Children and Families for receipt of Food Stamps.

Clients living on fixed income receiving less than \$100.00 in SNAP benefits are eligible for Food Cards.

To receive financial assistance for food, recipients must complete a Food Card Disbursement Form and sign it to acknowledge their understanding and agreement to comply with the terms and conditions outlined therein.

Food Card Use Agreement	
I understand that:	
1.	I am receiving food assistance based on true and accurate information provided to the specialist.
2.	Food is provided on an emergency basis for crisis stabilization resulting from my victimization.
3.	I will NOT use the food to purchase Tobacco, Alcohol, any Lottery Items, or Money Orders.
4.	I MAY use this food card for necessary non-food products such as cleaning, hygiene, and non-prescription medical items.
5.	I will mail the cashier's complete/unaltered receipt(s) for all items purchased with this card(s) to the Victim Services Center in the self-addressed envelope provided to me within one week of receipt of food(s).
6.	Any food card(s) lost or stolen must be reported to specialist immediately and WILL NOT be replaced by the Victim Services Center.
7.	My household receives \$ <u>0</u> (initial here) monthly food assistance from the state, federal, and other agencies.
Future Food Card Assistance	
1.	Persons who do not return their itemized food purchase receipts for the amount of the card(s) will not be eligible for future food card(s) assistance. The return of the itemized receipts is required as verification of compliance.
2.	Persons who do not comply with the terms and conditions as set forth in this food card agreement will not be eligible for future food card(s) assistance.

The OIG randomly selected 27 recipients who obtained a total of 114 gift cards then contacted Winn-Dixie to verify whether any purchases of tobacco, alcohol, lottery items, or money orders had occurred using the gift cards.

Findings

The OIG reviewed information from Winn-Dixie that showed gift cards given to two recipients were not used by them but instead were used by others, and alcohol was purchased.

The OIG contacted the Social Services Department, which confirmed that the two recipients failed to submit copies of their receipts as required by the Food Card Use Agreement. Additionally, they did not report their gift cards as lost or stolen.

The OIG spoke with relevant personnel at Winn-Dixie, who confirmed they can prohibit the purchase of tobacco, alcohol, lottery items, and money orders with their gift cards. They explained that to implement this restriction, the Social Services Department would need to buy the gift cards through the Winn-Dixie Corporate Office and call them to request that these items be barred from gift card purchases.

Recommended Corrective Actions

- 1: The OIG recommends that the Social Services Department specify in the Food Card Use Agreement that the recipient will be the only user of the gift card.
- 2: If this practice is not currently in place, the OIG recommends that the Social Services Department acquire gift cards directly from the Winn-Dixie corporate office.
- 3: To improve efficiency and reduce the burden on recipients who must mail in their purchase receipts, the OIG recommends that the Social Services Department contact the corporate office of Winn-Dixie and request that the purchase of tobacco, alcohol, lottery tickets, and money orders be prohibited from the gift cards.
- 4: If the Social Services Department decides to procure gift cards or any other type of prepaid cards from another provider for financial assistance with food, the OIG recommends following certain guidelines and ensuring that the selected company can effectively restrict purchases of tobacco, alcohol, lottery items, or money orders.

Management's Response

- 1: The Food Card Use Agreement form has been updated to include: I am the sole user of the food card.
 - 2: The Social Services Division purchases Winn-Dixie and Harvey's food cards via the Southeastern Grocers corporate website, which is the corporate office of Winn-Dixie.
 - 3: With the new online purchasing option via Southeastern Grocers, we can choose the restricted card that reads "Not valid towards alcohol or tobacco purchases. Additional restrictions apply, see reverse", on the front of the card. The back of the card reads, "Not valid towards alcohol, tobacco, lottery, check fees, special events, money orders and fees, Ticketmaster, Western Union, express shipping, utility payments, flu shots, gift cards, gasoline, and phone cards.
 - 4: The Social Services Division will purchase food cards with restricted use.
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Inspector General Standards

This report/review has been conducted in accordance with the ASSOCIATION OF INSPECTORS GENERAL Principles and Quality Standards for Investigations.

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