

MOVING TO ILLINOIS

A Safe Start Guide for Survivors

Trafficking • Domestic Violence • Sexual Assault • Stalking

This guide is for you if you are thinking about
moving to Illinois to start over safely.

Everything here is written in plain language.

No police report is required for most protections.

A Publication of **Aero Swift Legal Consultants LLC**

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Why Survivors Choose Illinois

If you are reading this, you may be thinking about leaving a dangerous situation and starting over somewhere safe. Illinois is one of the best states in the country for survivors. Here is why.

Your name change stays private

Most states require your name change to be published in a local newspaper. That means your abuser could find you just by searching public notices. **Illinois eliminated this requirement in March 2025.** Your name change is not published anywhere.

Your records can be sealed

When you change your name in Illinois, you can file a Motion to Impound at the same time. This seals the connection between your old name and your new name so it cannot be found in court record searches.

You can hide your address from government records

The Illinois Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) gives you a substitute address. This address goes on your driver's license, voter registration, and all other state records. Your real address stays hidden. It is free and you do not need a police report.

Trafficking survivors have special protections

If you were trafficked and coerced into activities that created a criminal record, Illinois law still lets you change your name. This exception exists because the state recognizes that trafficking victims are not responsible for what their traffickers forced them to do.

You can get a new Social Security Number

After your name change is complete, you can apply for a new Social Security Number. A 2021 policy change made this much easier. You no longer need to prove your abuser is misusing your SSN. You just need evidence of abuse or danger.

SAFETY WARNING: If you are reading this on a shared device, clear your browser history when you are done. If your abuser monitors your phone or computer, consider reading this on a public library computer or a friend's device.

Before You Move: Planning Your Safe Exit

Leaving is the most dangerous time. Plan carefully. You do not have to do everything at once.

Documents to Gather

If it is safe to do so, collect the following documents before you leave. If you cannot get originals, that is okay. You can request copies later.

Essential documents (try to bring these)

- Your birth certificate (or know where it was issued so you can order a copy)
- Your Social Security card (or at least know your number)
- Any form of photo ID (driver's license, passport, state ID)
- Immigration documents if applicable (visa, green card, work permit)
- Children's birth certificates, Social Security cards, school records, and custody orders

Evidence of abuse (for identity protection applications)

- Police reports (if any exist)
- Medical records showing injuries
- Photos of injuries
- Protection orders or restraining orders
- Letters from counselors, therapists, social workers, shelter staff, or advocates
- Letters from friends or family who know about the abuse
- Text messages, emails, or voicemails showing threats or abuse

You do not need all of these. Even one or two items can be enough to support your applications.

Financial items (if you can access them)

- Cash (enough for a few weeks if possible)
- A bank account or prepaid debit card in your name only
- A separate phone or burner phone
- Medications you need

What NOT to Do When Leaving

X DO NOT forward your mail through USPS. Mail forwarding records are searchable in databases that skip tracers and abusers can access.

X DO NOT tell anyone your destination who does not absolutely need to know.

X DO NOT use shared social media accounts, family phone plans, or joint bank accounts after you leave.

X DO NOT check in to locations on social media.

X DO NOT use your old email address for anything related to your new life.

INSTEAD: Set up a new email address on a device your abuser has never touched. Use this email for everything related to your move. Consider a free encrypted email like ProtonMail (proton.me).

Arriving in Illinois: Your First Steps

You made it. Here is what to do in your first days and weeks.

If You Need Shelter Right Now

Call the **Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline: (877) 863-6338**. This is free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Tell them you are fleeing abuse and have just arrived in Illinois. They can connect you with emergency shelter.

SHELTERS THAT ACCEPT OUT-OF-STATE SURVIVORS

A Safe Place (Lake County): (847) 249-4450 — Explicitly accepts survivors from across the state, region, and country

Crisis Center for South Suburbia (Tinley Park): (708) 429-7233 — 54-bed shelter serving south suburban Chicago

Connections for Abused Women and Their Children (Chicago): (773) 278-4566

The Network statewide hotline can match you to the nearest available bed: (877) 863-6338

For trafficking survivors specifically:

Salvation Army STOP-IT Program: (877) 606-3158 (24/7)

National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

If You Have Housing But Need Help

If you have a friend, family member, or extended stay hotel, your first priorities are getting connected to services and protecting your new address.

Coordinated Entry for Survivors

All Chicago runs a special housing pathway for survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, sexual assault, and stalking. To access it, call the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline at (877) 863-6338 and ask for a **Coordinated Entry Assessment**. This puts you in the system for housing assistance including rapid rehousing programs with rental subsidies.

Getting an Illinois ID

You can get an Illinois driver's license or state ID at any Secretary of State Driver Services facility. You will need:

- Proof of identity (current out-of-state ID, passport, or birth certificate)
- Your Social Security card or W-2 or pay stub showing your SSN
- Two documents proving your Illinois address (lease, utility bill, bank statement, or a letter from where you are staying)

TIMING TIP: If you plan to enroll in the Address Confidentiality Program (ACP), do that FIRST. Then use your ACP substitute address when you get your Illinois ID. This way your real address never appears on your license or in the Secretary of State's database.

Setting Up Utilities Without a Paper Trail

- Ask if you can set up the account under your new name (if you have already changed it)
- If your name change is not done yet, consider having a trusted person set up utilities in their name
- Use your ACP substitute address for all account correspondence
- Opt out of your utility company's data sharing or public directory listings
- Never use auto-pay linked to an old bank account your abuser knows about

Health Insurance and Medical Care

If you are low-income, you can get **free health insurance through Illinois Medicaid** right away. Illinois has no minimum residency requirement. You can apply the day you arrive.

How to Apply for Medicaid

1. **Online:** abe.illinois.gov (Application for Benefits Eligibility)
2. **By phone:** 1-800-843-6154
3. **In person:** Any Family Community Resource Center (search "FCRC near me")

Who qualifies: Adults 19–64 earning up to about \$21,600 per year (138% of the federal poverty level). No asset test. If you have no income right now, you qualify.

Proof of residency: If you are staying in a shelter or with someone temporarily, a letter on their letterhead or stationery saying you are staying there is enough. You do not need a lease or utility bill.

Mental Health Care

Illinois Medicaid covers therapy, psychiatric care, and medication for PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other conditions. There are no strict limits on the number of therapy sessions. Evidence-based trauma treatments like EMDR and CPT are covered.

If you need help RIGHT NOW

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988
- **CARES Line:** 1-800-345-9049 (24/7 crisis response, dispatches a worker within 2 hours)
- **RAINN Sexual Assault Hotline:** 1-800-656-4673

Sexual Assault Survivors: Free Medical Care

Under the Illinois Sexual Assault Survivors Emergency Treatment Act (SASETA), if you were sexually assaulted, you are entitled to **free medical care for 180 days** after the assault. This includes the forensic exam (SANE exam), emergency contraception, STI testing and treatment, and follow-up care. You should not be billed for any of this. No police report is required.

Protecting Your Identity: Step by Step

This is the core of your fresh start. Follow these steps in order. Each one builds on the last.

Step 1: Address Confidentiality Program (ACP)

What it does: Gives you a substitute mailing address. Your real address is kept confidential. All state and local government agencies must accept the substitute address.

Cost: Free

Police report required: No

How long it lasts: 4 years, renewable

What you need to apply:

- Proof you live in Illinois (lease, utility bill, or letter from someone you are staying with)
- That's it. You just state that you believe you are a victim of violence and fear for your safety.

How to apply: Visit illinoisattorneygeneral.gov and search "Address Confidentiality Program." You can apply online.

What the ACP covers:

- Driver's license and state ID
- Voter registration
- All state and local government records
- Includes mail forwarding (first-class mail sent to ACP address gets forwarded to you)

IMPORTANT TIMING: Apply BEFORE or IMMEDIATELY AFTER moving to a new address. The ACP cannot remove information already in public records. It only prevents your new address from entering public records going forward.

Step 2: Legal Name Change

When to do this: After you have lived in Illinois for at least 3 months.

What you need:

1. Request for Name Change form ([download from illinoiscourts.gov](http://illinoiscourts.gov))
2. Order for Name Change form

3. Motion to Impound (this seals your records — file this at the SAME TIME)

4. Order to Impound form

5. Filing fee (can be waived if you cannot afford it — ask the clerk for a fee waiver application)

What happens:

- You file the forms at the Circuit Clerk in the county where you live
- You get a court date
- A judge asks you questions and grants or denies your request
- If granted, you get certified copies of the order to use for updating your records

Privacy protections:

- No newspaper publication required
- Motion to Impound seals the records so no one can search and find the connection between your old and new names
- You can leave your address off all court documents and use your ACP address instead

Step 3: New Social Security Number

When to do this: After your name change is finalized.

Where: You must apply in person at a Social Security office. You cannot do this online or by mail.

What you need:

- Your current Social Security Number
- Proof of citizenship (passport or birth certificate)
- Photo ID
- Court order for name change
- Evidence of abuse (police reports, medical records, protection orders, letters from counselors or advocates, letters from shelters, or letters from people who know about the abuse)

For complete SSA information, see: [SSA Publication No. 05-10093](#)

Good to know:

- This process is slow. Plan for it to take several months.
- Your old SSN and new SSN are cross-referenced inside Social Security's system. But your new number protects you from being found through medical records, court records, employment records, and other databases.
- Your credit history does not automatically transfer. You will essentially be starting fresh.
- If you have children with sole custody, you can get new SSNs for them at the same time.

Step 4: Update Your Records

Once you have your new name, new SSN, and ACP enrollment, update everything. Use your ACP substitute address on all of these:

- **Illinois driver's license or state ID** — Visit any Secretary of State facility with your court order, new SSN card, and ACP confirmation
- **U.S. Passport** — Submit Form DS-5504 (within 1 year of passport) or DS-82 with court order and new photo
- **Voter registration** — Through your county clerk or Illinois State Board of Elections
- **Banks and financial accounts**
- **Insurance companies** (health, auto, life)
- **Employer / HR department**

- **Professional licenses**
- **Schools and universities** (transcripts)

Digital Safety: Covering Your Tracks Online

Your physical safety plan is only as strong as your digital safety. Abusers and traffickers often use technology to find and control victims.

Immediate Digital Safety Steps

- 1. Get a new phone or phone number.** If your abuser ever had access to your phone, assume it is compromised. A prepaid phone from a store with cash is safest.
- 2. Create a new email address.** Use ProtonMail (proton.me) or another encrypted email. Never access it from a device your abuser has touched.
- 3. Turn off location sharing on all devices.** Check your phone's settings, Google account, Apple ID, and any apps that use your location.
- 4. Check for tracking apps.** Have your phone checked by a DV advocate or tech-savvy friend. Common spyware hides itself.
- 5. Change all passwords.** Use a password manager (Bitwarden is free). Never reuse passwords from your old life.
- 6. Remove yourself from data broker sites.** This is time-consuming but important. Major ones:
 - Spokeo: spokeo.com/optout
 - WhitePages: whitepages.com/suppression_requests
 - BeenVerified: beenverified.com/faq/opt-out
 - Intelius: intelius.com/opt-out
 - TruePeopleSearch: truepeoplesearch.com/removal

Credit Freeze

Place a security freeze on your credit with all three bureaus. This prevents anyone from opening new accounts in your name.

- Equifax: equifax.com
- Experian: experian.com/freeze
- TransUnion: transunion.com/credit-freeze

IRS Identity Protection

Apply for an IRS Identity Protection PIN to prevent someone from filing fraudulent tax returns using your SSN. Apply at [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov).

Work and Money

Your Rights as a Survivor Employee

Illinois has one of the strongest survivor employment protection laws in the country. The **Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (VESSA)**, updated January 1, 2026, gives you:

- **Up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave** for medical care, counseling, court dates, safety planning, or looking for housing
- **Workplace accommodations** like a changed phone number, modified schedule, or relocated workspace
- **Protection from being fired** because of your status as a survivor

Your employer cannot ask you for a police report. Your own sworn statement is enough proof. If your employer violates VESSA, contact the Illinois Department of Labor at (312) 793-6797.

Job Resources for Survivors

- **Heartland Human Care Services** (Chicago): Work readiness training and job placement regardless of immigration status. (312) 660-1300
- **Salvation Army STOP-IT**: Case management connecting trafficking survivors to employment. (877) 606-3158
- **Crisis Center for South Suburbia**: Employment programs for survivors. (708) 429-7233

Financial Safety Tips

- Open a new bank account at a bank your abuser does not use, with your new address and name (when available)
- If you receive direct deposit, make sure your employer updates to your new account
- Do not link old and new accounts
- Consider keeping some cash on hand for emergencies

Housing Protections in Illinois

Illinois Safe Homes Act

As of January 1, 2026, every landlord in Illinois must give you a written Summary of Rights when you sign a lease. This is a new law. The summary explains your rights as a survivor, including:

- The right to break your lease early without penalty if you are facing domestic or sexual violence
- The right to change or rekey your locks
- Protection from being evicted because of incidents of domestic or sexual violence
- Protection from discrimination as a survivor

Federal VAWA Housing Protections

If you live in any federally subsidized housing (public housing, Section 8, or other HUD-assisted programs), the Violence Against Women Act gives you additional protections:

- You cannot be denied housing, evicted, or lose your assistance because of your status as a DV, SA, stalking, or trafficking survivor
- You can request an emergency transfer to another unit
- You can move your Section 8 voucher to a new location without the usual first-year restrictions
- You can self-certify your survivor status using HUD Form 5382 — no police report required

Rapid Rehousing for Survivors

All Chicago manages a special housing program funded by a \$4.1 million HUD grant specifically for survivors of gender-based violence. To access it, call the Illinois DV Hotline at (877) 863-6338 and ask for a Coordinated Entry Assessment. You can also email ces@chicagococ.org or call (872) 296-5004.

Your Timeline: A Checklist

Before You Leave

- ✓ Gather documents (ID, birth certificate, SSN card, evidence of abuse)
- ✓ Set up a new, secret email address
- ✓ Save cash if possible
- ✓ Call the Illinois DV Hotline (877) 863-6338 to plan your arrival
- ✓ Do NOT file a USPS mail forwarding request

Week 1 in Illinois

- ✓ Connect with a shelter or advocate
- ✓ Apply for Medicaid at abe.illinois.gov
- ✓ Apply for Address Confidentiality Program (ACP)
- ✓ If you need immediate mental health support, call CARES Line: 1-800-345-9049
- ✓ Apply for SNAP (food assistance) through abe.illinois.gov

Month 1

- ✓ Get Illinois ID using ACP substitute address
- ✓ Start therapy (through Medicaid or shelter/advocacy organization)
- ✓ Freeze your credit with all three bureaus
- ✓ Begin data broker opt-outs
- ✓ Apply for IRS Identity Protection PIN
- ✓ Ask for Coordinated Entry housing assessment if you need housing

Month 3

- ✓ You now meet the 3-month residency requirement for a name change
- ✓ File name change petition with Motion to Impound
- ✓ Attend court hearing for name change

Month 6 and Beyond

- ✓ After name change is granted, apply for new Social Security Number

- ✓ Update all records with new name, SSN, and ACP address
- ✓ Get new driver's license with new name and ACP address
- ✓ Apply for new passport
- ✓ Update bank accounts, insurance, employer records

Free Legal Help in Illinois

You do not have to do this alone. Several organizations provide free legal help to survivors.

For trafficking survivors

- **Legal Aid Chicago — Trafficking Survivors Assistance Project:** (312) 341-1070 (statewide for trafficking survivors)
- **National Immigrant Justice Center:** (773) 672-6550 (trafficking referral line)
- **Metropolitan Family Services — Human Trafficking Initiative:** (312) 986-4105

For domestic violence and sexual assault survivors

- **CAASE (Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation):** (773) 244-2230
- **Ascend Justice:** (312) 325-9155 (DV, SA, trafficking, stalking)
- **Life Span:** (312) 408-1210 (services in 9 languages)

General legal aid

- **Prairie State Legal Services:** Covers 36 counties across Northern and Central Illinois
- **Illinois Legal Aid Online:** illinoislegalaid.org (self-help resources and referrals)

Crisis Hotlines — Save These Numbers

<p>National DV Hotline 1-800-799-7233 thehotline.org</p>	<p>Human Trafficking Hotline 1-888-373-7888 humantraffickinghotline.org</p>
<p>RAINN (Sexual Assault) 1-800-656-4673</p>	<p>Illinois DV Helpline (877) 863-6338 24/7 statewide</p>
<p>988 Crisis Lifeline Call or Text 988 Suicide & crisis support</p>	<p>CARES Crisis Response 1-800-345-9049 24/7, sends help within 2 hours</p>

All hotlines are free, confidential, and available 24/7.

About This Guide

This guide was created by Aero Swift Legal Consultants LLC in partnership with ICLlofIllinois to help survivors navigate the process of relocating to Illinois and building a safe, new life.

We provide free consultations for trafficking survivors and can help you with identity protection, name changes, ACP enrollment, and understanding your legal options.

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