

Date : July 26, 2016

To : Honorable Board of Supervisors

From : James A. Rydingsword, Director
San Benito County Health & Human Services Agency

Subject: Resolution adopting revised general assistance standard of aid and program policies and procedures

Summary:

The General Relief/General Assistance (GR/GA) program is a state mandated, 100% County funded program that provides cash assistance to eligible disabled or unemployed adult individuals who are ineligible for other aid programs. In 1981, pursuant to §17001 of the Welfare and Institutions Code which requires the adoption by the Board of Supervisors of standards of aid and care, the San Benito County Board of Supervisors adopted standards of aid and program regulations for the General Relief program. The GR/GA program continues to be administered pursuant to the program regulations and standard of aid adopted by your Board in 1981 and revised in 2014 to the current "General Assistance" (GA) program. Since then the program has grown as has the County's indigent population. I am requesting that your Board adopt the resolution revising the standard of aid, adopting revised program policies and procedures and dividing the benefits paid to recipients into three components.

Background Information:

California Welfare & Institutions Code section 17000 (hereafter W&I code) requires every County to relieve and support all incompetent, poor, and/or indigent persons and those incapacitated by age, disease and accident, who lawfully reside therein, when such persons are not supported and relieved by their relatives or friends; by their own means; by State hospitals or other state or private institutions. The California Supreme Court has interpreted this statute as imposing a mandatory duty for all 58 counties to provide a system of "last resort" for indigent persons. The right to receive such assistance has been held to be a property right that is protected by constitutional standards of due process.

The general assistance statutes do not mandate any given set of procedures, benefit levels, or eligibility criteria to be applied by counties in administering their general assistance programs, but establishes basic principles and guidelines that should be followed by counties in adopting their own procedures and regulations. W&I Code §17000.5 establishes the formula under which the Board of Supervisors may adopt a general assistance standard of aid which constitutes a legally "sufficient standard of aid."

The GA program is funded solely with Net County Cost general funds with no available reimbursement or matching funds from the State or Federal government. Eligible GA program participants currently receive an individual maximum aid amount of \$ 360.09 per month that is considered a loan, to be repaid in accordance with their future financial ability; are enrolled in Medical Services Initiative program; may be determined eligible for CalFresh (food stamps); and are required to participate in the JobLink/Job Search Program or a County Work/Participation Program as a condition of eligibility.

The standard of aid adopted in 1981 has remained the same despite changes in the law in 1991 which authorized county boards of supervisors to adopt a general assistance standard of aid that is 62% of the 1991 federal official poverty line and to adjust that standard according to AFDC (now CalWORKs) adjustments. The current allowable adjustment is a reduction to \$331 for a single person and \$541 for a two person household.

The recommended action will adjust the current GA standard of aid in accordance with W&I Code §17000.5(a). The actual monthly aid payment will vary based on an individual's circumstances as the amount of the aid may be reduced based on the recipient's earned or unearned income, free basic needs (in kind income), shared housing, etc.

The revised policies and procedures will divide the benefit into four components: 1)Housing 2)Utilities, 3)Personal & Incidental and 4)Income In Kind. The Director's presentation includes a chart that compares the current and proposed aid payments. Additionally, the caseload is divided into groups based on their "living condition" and the aid payments will be adjusted according (i.e. if you paying rent). The established program guidelines continue to aid GA recipients in developing a plan of rehabilitation and support so they become self-sufficient and independent of further public assistance. The proposed revisions include additional program participation activities and require application to the CDGB rental assistance grant program and HUD Section 8 voucher program.

FISCAL IMPACT

The GA program requires assignment from the County General Fund Appropriations to cover the projected cost for the fiscal year. The costs are projected to range from approximately \$135,000 to \$221,000 depending on the demographics of the caseload and any realized offsets and reimbursements.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Our agency has worked closely with County Counsel to ensure that the proposed policies and procedures are in compliance with all applicable Federal, State and local laws.