



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 12/14/2021

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Human Services

Staff Name and Phone Number: Felisa Pinson 565-2198, Greg Baker 565-2092

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisory District(s): Countywide

Title:

General Assistance Maximum Grant Increase

Recommended Action:

Approve a 5.3% increase in the maximum General Assistance Aid Payment effective January 1, 2022, to align with the 5.3% increase in the CalWORKs Maximum Aid Payment, and adopt changes to the General Assistance Manual of Policies and Procedures to reflect the increased aid amounts paid to recipients.

Executive Summary:

The Human Services Department recommends approval of a 5.3% increase in the maximum General Assistance (GA) benefit paid to recipients starting January 1, 2022 to be in alignment with the 5.3% CalWORKs Maximum Aid Payment increase directed by the California Department of Social Services "All County Letter No. 21-87". Under the provisions of Welfare and Institutions Code Section 17000, the Board of Supervisors of each county adopts a standard of aid for the GA program which is 62% of the 1991 Federal Poverty Level. Historically, Sonoma County has increased or decreased the maximum General Assistance allotment to match the Maximum Aid Payment in CalWORKs (TANF). The last aid increase of 10% was in April 2019. There is sufficient funding in the current Human Services GA budget to absorb the proposed increase.

Discussion:

The General Assistance program was designed to assist eligible residents who do not have the financial resources to support themselves, and who do not qualify for federal or state aid. An applicant can request help with rent, utilities, transportation, food, incidentals (such as soap and shampoo) and special needs (such as clothing and shoes). Benefits can be granted for a total of 90 days in a 12-month period, unless the individual is incapacitated and unable to work, in which case there may be no time limit.

GA is a state-mandated program that counties must provide to all eligible applicants and is 100% funded through the County General Fund in most cases. The level of service provided to GA recipients is left to the discretion of county government. As such, the County can administer the program with latitude regarding the benefit amount, duration, and work requirements. The Board of Supervisors has the discretion to set the maximum grant allotment, however, Sonoma County has historically increased or decreased the maximum GA allotment to align with the Maximum Aid Payment for CalWORKs.

The Sonoma County GA caseload is primarily made up of single adults (approximately 98%). The caseload has fluctuated over the past 4 years from a high of 322 active cases in August 2017 to a low of 80 cases in July

2021. In August 2021, 84 individuals were receiving GA benefits, of whom 61% were unable to work due to a temporary or permanent incapacitating condition.

The current maximum GA payment of \$415 includes funding for housing, utilities, food and incidentals for one individual in Sonoma County; an increase of 5.3% would result in a maximum payment of \$437. For individuals who have no housing expenses, they now receive a maximum of \$163 per month for food and incidentals only; a 5.3% increase would result in a maximum payment of \$172. As of August 2021, 13 GA clients received housing and utilities, and 79 clients had no housing expenses and only received food and incidental payments. Sonoma County's GA recipients receive on average \$199 in benefits per month. These participants were also dually eligible for an average CalFresh benefit in the amount of \$234 a month.

GA also supports individuals receiving services from licensed non-profit facilities that provide recovery and vocational programs for individuals with alcohol and drug addiction. GA recipients are limited to 180 days of participation per lifetime in a drug and alcohol treatment facility, and the monthly GA benefits are paid directly to the facility. With a 5.3% increase, the maximum amount for an individual residing in a substance abuse treatment facility would increase from \$428 to \$451 per month. As of August 2021, 9 individuals receiving GA were residing in licensed facilities operated by California Human Development, Drug Abuse Alternatives Center, and Women's Recovery Services. The proposed increase would provide these facilities with approximately \$4,500 more per year (based on the average number of GA clients in a contracted facility during 2021).

If the recommendation to increase the maximum GA aid payment is approved, there would be an approximate increase of \$5,500 in GA benefits paid out for the remainder of FY 21/22, and an approximate increase of \$11,000 in total benefits starting in FY 22/23. Given the high cost of living in Sonoma County, this increase would only provide a fraction of the amount it would actually take to meet one's basic needs.

Strategic Plan:

The GA program provides money for rent, food, and other supportive services that contribute to a healthy and safe community, and aids in supporting return to work, school or other self-sufficiency endeavors. This is a strategic investment in prevention and intervention that aims to reduce poverty and increase positive life outcomes.

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Healthy and Safe Communities

Goal: Goal 1: Expand integrated system of care to address gaps in services to the County's most vulnerable.

Objective: Objective 1: Align the Board of Supervisor's strategic priorities, policy, and operational goals with funding and resources.

Prior Board Actions:

2/26/19: 10% increase to the General Assistance maximum grant.

4/28/15: 5% increase to the General Assistance maximum grant.

2/25/14: 5% increase to the General Assistance maximum grant.

6/14/11: 5% decrease to the General Assistance maximum grant.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 21-22 Adopted	FY22-23 Projected	FY 23-24 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	5,500	11,000	11,000
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$5,500	\$11,000	\$11,000
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF	5,500	11,000	11,000
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$5,500	\$11,000	\$11,000

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The FY 21/22 adopted budget includes appropriations of \$500,000 for GA benefits. The potential fiscal impact of the GA maximum aid payment increase is \$5,500 for the remainder of FY 21/22 and \$11,000 for FY 22/23 and FY 23/24. There is sufficient GA funding in the current fiscal year and in upcoming fiscal years to absorb the increase with no additional GF required. The increases can be absorbed as a result of underspending in the GA program, as evidenced in previous fiscal years, mostly due to decreasing caseloads.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

NA

Attachments:

- 1) Proposed General Assistance Maximum Grant Payment Chart
- 2) California Department of Social Services All County Letter (ACL) 21-87

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

NA