



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 2019-0025, **Version:** 1

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**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):** All

**Title:**

Increase of General Assistance Maximum Grant.

**Recommended Action:**

Approve a 10% increase in the maximum General Assistance aid payment effective April 1, 2019, to align with the 10% 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. There is sufficient funding in the current year to absorb the increase and no additional General Fund is required.

**Executive Summary:**

The Human Services Department recommends the approval of an increase in the maximum General Assistance (GA) paid to recipients by 10% starting April 1, 2019, to be in alignment with the 10% CalWORKs Maximum Aid Payment (MAP) increase directed by the California Department of Social Services All County Letter (ACL) 18-124 (Attachment 1). 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 5% was in May 2015.

**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.

General Assistance is a state-mandated program that counties must provide to all eligible clients and is 100% funded through County General Funds in most cases. However, the level of service provided to clientele is left at the discretion of county government. This arrangement makes sense since subvention of General Assistance is sourced primarily from county General Fund. As such, the county can administer the program with latitude regarding benefits duration (3 months) and work requirements (Work Project assignments). In short, General Assistance is state-mandated program with discretionary county funding. The Board of Supervisors has the discretion with regards to the maximum grant allotment, but is not required to align any increase or decrease with the Maximum Aid Payment for CalWORKs (TANF).

Historically, Sonoma County has increased or decreased the maximum General Assistance allotment to align with the Maximum Aid Payment for CalWORKs (TANF).

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 436 active cases in October 2014 to a low of 242 in June 2018. In November 2018, 255 individuals were receiving GA benefits, of which 82% were unable to work due to a temporary or permanent incapacitating condition. The GA caseload, as measured by annual expenditures, has decreased by 58% from October 2014 to November 2018, which the department believes is reflective of an improving economy (See Attachment 2).

The current maximum GA payment for one individual in Sonoma County is \$377, and a 10% increase would result in a maximum payment of \$415. Sonoma County's GA recipients receive an average of \$270 in benefits per month. As of November 2018, 137 GA clients had no housing expenses and received only food and incidental payments of \$148 per month. These participants were also eligible for an average CalFresh benefit of \$192 a month.

GA also serves 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 10% increase, the maximum amount for an individual residing in a substance abuse treatment facility would increase from \$390 to \$428 per month. As of November 2018, 58 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 give these facilities approximately \$26,000 more per year (based on the average number of GA clients in a contracted facility during 2018).

If the recommendation to increase the maximum General Assistance aid payment is approved, there would be an approximate increase of \$18,750 in GA benefits paid out for the remainder of FY 18/19, and an approximate increase of \$74,520 in benefits starting in FY 19/20. 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 most basic needs in our county.

**General Assistance Maximum Aid Payment** Current monthly payment: \$377 Proposed monthly payment: \$415

**Facility Maximum Aid Payments** Current monthly payment: \$390 Proposed monthly payment: \$428

**Prior Board Actions:**

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. 3/22/05: General Assistance Manual sections updated. 5/25/99: Increase the General Assistance maximum grant from \$279 to \$302.

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY 19-20 Adopted</b>	<b>FY20-21 Projected</b>	<b>FY 21-22 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses	18,750	74,520	74,520

Additional Appropriation Requested			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	18,750	74,520	74,520
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF	18,750	74,520	74,520
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>	18,750	74,520	74,520

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

The FY 2018/2019 adopted budget includes appropriations of \$715,165 for General Assistance benefits. The potential fiscal impact of the General Assistance Maximum aid payment increase is \$18,750 for the remainder of FY 2018/2019 and \$74,520 for FY 2019/2020. The projected GA grant expenditures in FY 2018-2019 are estimated to be around \$300,618; therefore; there is sufficient funding in the current year to absorb the increase and no additional General Fund is required. There will be no General Fund (GF) impact in FY 19-20 and beyond. The increases will be absorbed as a result of underspending in the GA budget, as evidenced in previous fiscal years, as well as declining caseloads for the foreseeable future.

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

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

NA

**Attachments:**

1) California Department of Social Services All County Letter (ACL) 18-124 2) 4-Year Trend of General Assistance Expenditures

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

NA