



Legislation Text

File #: 19-176, **Version:** 1

Approve revisions to the General Assistance Minute Order including updates to the grant amount and other regulatory and procedural revisions

Published Notice Required? Yes _____ No X
Public Hearing Required? Yes _____ No X

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION:

The Department of Health & Social Services (H&SS) recommends that the Board approve revisions to the General Assistance (GA) Minute Order including updates to the grant amount and other regulatory and procedural revisions.

SUMMARY:

The GA program is a cash assistance, safety net program of last resort for adults with little or no income and without children. The cash benefits are considered a loan. The GA Minute Order is the regulatory document for the GA program, outlining the guidelines for administering the GA program pursuant to Welfare & Institutions Code 17000. The GA Minute Order was last updated in December of 2002. The GA Minute Order should be updated so that the program rules remain compliant with industry practices and policy, advocate concerns, community needs, and Welfare & Institutions Code 17000.

The following are recommended revisions to the GA Minute Order:

- **GA Grant Amount:** Maintain the current GA grant amount of \$355 effective April 1, 2019. Annually thereafter, adjust the GA grant amount at the same percentage change as the U.S. Census Bureau Federal Poverty Level increase or decrease.
- **Client Identification:** Require verification of client identity utilizing multiple options including federal or state issued photo identification, taking a collateral statement of fact or verifying identity through the Medicaid Eligibility Data System (MEDS).
- **Sponsor Deeming:** Remove the Sponsor Deeming requirement for Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) and add of a period of ineligibility for GA assistance for 3 years after date of entry for LPRs.
- **Property Lien:** Remove the Property Lien requirement for real property.
- **Reporting Requirement:** Remove the monthly reporting requirement for employable GA clients, and change the reporting requirement from monthly to quarterly for unemployable GA clients. Income changes still must be reported within 5 days for both employable and unemployable GA clients.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Solano County has an average monthly GA caseload of 440/month year to date with 55% male and 45% female for FY2018/19. The FY2018/19 cost for this mandated program is \$2.6 million and is funded entirely by County General Fund. The recommended revision ties annual changes in the GA grant amount to the annual U.S. Census Bureau Federal Poverty Level percentage change which has averaged a 1.7% increase per year over the last 10 years. The costs associated with preparing this agenda item are nominal and absorbed by the department's FY2018/19 Adopted Budget.

DISCUSSION:

The Department of Health & Social Services (H&SS) is recommending the Board approve the following grant amount methodology and other regulatory and procedural revisions to the GA minute order:

GA Grant Amount

Currently the GA grant amount is connected to match the CalWORKs Maximum Aid Payment (MAP) Level for a family of 1. In 2018 the CalWORKs MAP Level for a family of 1, and thus the GA grant amount, was \$355 per month. However, the CalWORKs MAP will increase 10% based on AB1811 (Chapter 35, Statutes of 2018) on April 1, 2019. The recommended revision is effective April 2019, the GA grant amount will remain at \$355. In each year following, it is recommended that the GA grant amount be adjusted based on the same percentage changes as that the U.S. Census Bureau Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The U.S. Census Bureau FPL is adjusted to increase or decrease with inflation. Over the last 10 years the U.S. Census Bureau FPL has on average increased 1.7% annually.

Verification of Identity

The GA Minute Order currently has no requirement for clients to provide identification. Most public assistance programs have a requirement that an applicant verify their identity. Since the assistance benefits obtained through the GA program are a loan, it is even more imperative that we make every effort to verify an applicant's identity. The recommended revision is to require client identification. This new provision utilizes multiple options for a verification of identity to including federal or state issued photo identification, taking a collateral statement of fact or verifying identity through the Medicaid Eligibility Data System (MEDS). Providing for multiple identification options will minimize hardship to clients who may have difficulty in meeting the requirement.

Sponsor Deeming

The current GA Minute Order includes a sponsor deeming requirement for Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) in which the GA client is asked to provide verification of sponsor support. Without the verification of sponsor support the individual is not eligible for GA. If the GA applicant is able to provide sponsor verification, the applicant is likely ineligible for the GA program due to the resources (income) of the sponsor. The recommended revision to the GA Minute Order is to remove the sponsor deeming requirement and make the first 3 years after date of entry of Legal Permanent Residency a period of ineligibility for the GA program.

Property Lien

Currently the GA Minute Order requires the county to put a lien on any real property the GA client has a vested interest in. The recommended revision is to remove the lien requirement for real property. Very rarely do GA clients own real property. From 2005 to 2019 only 2 GA clients had real property. Given the infrequency of GA clients that own real property, the recommendation is to remove the lien requirement.

Reporting Requirement

The existing GA minute order requires monthly reporting for both employable and unemployable GA clients. The recommended revision is to remove the reporting requirement for employable GA clients and change to quarterly reporting for unemployable GA clients. Income changes must still be reported within 5 days for both employable and unemployable clients. All other State/Federal public assistance programs have moved away from monthly reporting to either quarterly or semi-annually reporting due to the unnecessarily heavy burden and client hardship. Employable GA clients are limited to 3 months of GA assistance in a 12 month period. Of employable GA clients 96% remain eligible for the 3rd month of GA assistance. For this reason, the recommended revision is to remove the reporting requirement for employable GA clients.

For unemployable GA clients the recommended revision is to move to quarterly reporting to align with all other State/Federal public assistance programs and to reduce administrative burden and client hardship.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board could elect not to approve the proposed revisions to the GA Minute Order; however, this is not recommended as it could result in a negative financial impact to the county, inefficient use of county resources, and will impact the Department's ability to keep the Minute Order updated and current, and responsive to industry practices, policy, advocate concerns, community needs, and Welfare & Institutions Code 17000.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

None.

CAO RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION