



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

File #: 21-720

Board Meeting Date: 9/14/2021

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Ken Cole, Director, Human Services Agency

Subject: Modification to the General Assistance Program Rules and Regulations

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution authorizing modification to the rules and regulations of the General Assistance (GA) Program administration by:

- A) Authorizing the use of CalWORKs rules in the absence of GA guidance; and
- B) Establishing new property limits, which include: (1) combining personal and real property as countable property; (2) increasing the property limit to be double the GA grant amount; (3) exempting one vehicle and additional vehicles with a combined equity value below four times the GA grant amount; and (4) exempting a primary residence with an equity value up to \$100,000; and
- C) Allowing for restoration of aid when a QR-7 report is submitted in the month following discontinuance, which aligns with other Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS) programs; and
- D) Allowing for the Beginning Date of Aid (BDOA) to be the date of application and eliminating the requirement that states the BDOA is the first of the month following the date of application if verification/information is provided outside of the application month, but within processing time frames, which aligns with other ESS programs; and
- E) Allowing for the alignment with the CalFresh program rules regarding earned income deductions and eliminating the provision that states to subtract certain work-related expenses to determine the amount of net income; and
- F) Allowing the option for GA interviews to be conducted via telephone or other electronic means and eliminating the provision that states interviews must be conducted in-person, unless an in-person interview is requested by the applicant, which aligns with other ESS programs; and

- G) Allowing the option for the acceptance of telephonic/electronic signatures for GA forms/documents, which aligns with other ESS programs; and
- H) Providing GA clients up to 10 calendar days to report any changes to HSA that affects their GA eligibility, which aligns with other ESS programs; and
- I) Providing additional options for work participation requirements based on agency approval and providing a blanket exemption when HSA is unable to provide all required work participation hours; and
- J) Allowing the issuance of vendor payments for housing and utilities upon client request; and
- K) Updating the term for licensed “Board and Care” facilities to align with the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) terminology of “Non-Medical Out of Home Care” for the higher rate paid; and
- L) Eliminate the current ‘regular’ Board and Care and Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) rate as it is not connected with SSA or CalWORKs grant levels; and
- M) Authorizing the elimination of the requirement for clients to sign an agreement to reimburse aid; and
- N) Formalizing the process for the HSA Director to make temporary program changes during an emergency without having to seek Board of Supervisor approval; and
- O) Utilizing the GA Handbook as the sole HSA regulations for GA policy/procedures and obsoleting the GA Manual.

BACKGROUND:

State law requires counties to provide support for indigent county residents who do not qualify for other financial assistance. Counties meet this requirement by providing financial assistance through the GA program. Pursuant to Section 2.30.050 of the San Mateo County Ordinance Code, the Human Services Agency (HSA) is responsible for proposing changes to the rules and regulations concerning policies and procedures for GA program administration to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

DISCUSSION:

Some GA program requirements, such as the property limits, have not been updated in more than 20 years. HSA reviewed the SMC GA program rules and conducted a comparative analysis with surrounding counties, consulted with county stakeholders, and based on the feedback is recommends the proposed changes.

HSA requests to change the GA program administration to improve service delivery to the GA population by aligning program rules with other ESS programs to create better uniformity for clients participating in more than one ESS program; removing outdated requirements that no longer align with program goals and HSA’s mission; reducing bureaucratic processes that do not meet the overall program goals; better aligning the GA program with the surrounding Bay Area counties.

These changes will help ensure the GA program is meeting HSA’s mission and values, specifically

enhancing the well-being of vulnerable adults, creating a remarkable experience for clients, continuous program improvement, and being responsive to client and staff needs. The proposed changes allow for continuous program improvements by linking the GA levels and property requirements to the already established CalWORKs and SSA payment levels.

If adopted, the proposed changes to the GA program will be implemented no later than March 1, 2022. Full implementation of the GA changes includes publishing a revised GA handbook, disseminating system workaround to ensure GA eligibility is determined accurately under the new GA program requirements, training staff on both the new GA program requirements and the system workarounds, and communicating the changes and partnering with stakeholders to seamlessly implement these changes.

These recommendations are brought to the Board for approval as required by San Mateo County Ordinance Code Section 2.30.050.

County Counsel has reviewed and approved the resolution as to form.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The FY 2021-22 fiscal impact of implementing modifications to the General Assistance (GA) program rules and regulations is estimated at \$274,800 which will cover an estimated 20% increase in GA cases primarily due to new property limits. Funding for this increase is included in the FY 2021-22 Adopted Budget and no additional Net County Cost is needed.