





Office of the City Manager

ACTION CALENDAR
December 11, 2007

To:  Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From:  Phil Kamlarz, City Manager
Submitted By: Renelda Mary, Housing Department
Subject: Proposed General Assistance Budget Reductions in FY08

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution directing the City Manager to work closely with the Alameda County Social Services Agency to mitigate the negative consequences of General Assistance cuts to Berkeley residents.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The County's Social Service Agency's (SSA) current caseload of General Assistance (GA) recipients is approximately 8,000 people. We are awaiting data from SSA about the percentage of these recipients who are Berkeley residents but we expect that approximately 1,000 Berkeley residents receive GA. SSA is seeking to reduce the number of GA recipients by 60% by limiting the receipt of GA to six months in a 12-month period for recipients who are deemed "employable". The Health & Human Services Director and Housing Department staff met with the SSA Director on November 16, 2007 to discuss these reductions. She estimates that 5,000 of the current GA recipients are "employable" and will be impacted by the time limits. We do not know how many of these recipients are Berkeley residents, but we can assume that the GA reductions will negatively effect many extremely low-income Berkeley individuals.

BACKGROUND

The Homeless Commission has asked Council to oppose the County of Alameda Social Service Agency's plan to limit General Assistance to six months of the year for people the Agency determines are "employable". While I share the Commission's concerns, I believe we need to work in partnership with SSA to mitigate the negative consequences of these reductions on Berkeley citizens. I have directed staff to meet with the SSA Director and to identify strategies to ensure a reasonable implementation of the reduction.

Like many counties, Alameda County faces a significant General Fund deficit. 32 California counties have already instituted GA cuts, and most of these counties limit their assistance to three months. Alameda County has seen its GA roll more than triple in the last several years while neighboring counties have seen dramatic reductions. For example, Contra Costa County currently has 500 recipients on its GA rolls as compared

to Alameda County's 8,000. A number of years ago, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors approved an ordinance authorizing the SSA to institute GA time limits. The Board of Supervisors is still in the process of receiving information from SSA about how they will implement this change; however, no further Board action is necessary for the SSA to move forward in January 2008 to begin limiting aid to "employable" GA recipients.

While cuts to General Assistance appear to be unavoidable, we are committed to mitigating the negative consequences. Currently, SSA relies primarily on self-report to determine whether a GA recipient is "employable". They have some limited capacity to assess medical disabilities that limit a recipient's employability but no capacity to assess mental disabilities. The SSA Director has invited the City of Berkeley to provide information about GA recipients working with Berkeley Mental Health and community agencies who are not able to work. She will ensure that these individuals are not subjected to the employability determination. The SSA Director has also discussed several strategies she will undertake to improve access to SSI for those GA recipients who are eligible. City of Berkeley staff will work closely with SSA to implement these strategies and will continue to promote SSI advocacy through current community agency efforts and those that will be added with resources generated through the Public Commons for Everyone Initiative.

CONTACT PERSON

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RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

MITIGATE THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF GENERAL ASSISTANCE
REDUCTIONS TO BERKELEY RESIDENTS.

WHEREAS, there are approximately 8,000 General Assistance recipients in Alameda County; and

WHEREAS, approximately 1,000 of these recipients are Berkeley residents; and

WHEREAS, Alameda County Social Services Agency has proposed a time limit on General Assistance payments to “employable” recipients as a budget reduction strategy; and

WHEREAS, City of Berkeley staff have met with the Social Services Agency Director to determine strategies to prevent “unemployable” General Assistance recipients from facing benefits reductions.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that the City Manager work closely with the Alameda County Social Services Agency to mitigate the negative consequences of General Assistance cuts to Berkeley residents.

