

**1. Program Title: General Assistance (Operations) (GA)**

**Program Description:** California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Sections 17000 to 17030.1 mandate that every county and city shall provide support to poor, indigent persons who are not supported or relieved by their relatives or friends and do not qualify for other aid programs. This program is funded entirely from the County General Fund.

While there are no statutorily mandated application processing timelines for aid granted under WIC 17000, other than Sacramento County-adopted policies that GA applications be processed within 30 days, counties are not authorized to unduly delay eligibility determinations. In 2009, legal advocates filed a writ of mandate against Contra Costa County seeking to remedy General Assistance application delays. Contra Costa acknowledged that staffing cuts had doubled the time to process GA applications from approximately three months to six months. Contra Costa settled the case and agreed to bring application times down to 45 days and then 30 days, eliminate the application requirements which added to the delay, and pay retroactive aid back to the application date.

County Counsel has advised the Department of Human Assistance that while no court has yet determined the legal timeframe in which GA applications must be granted or denied, aligning GA processing times with the CalWORKs requirement of 45 days is likely a maximum time frame, particularly in light of the Contra Costa settlement. Further, it is probable that a court would find a shorter timeframe is required given the fact that GA is the program of last resort and the urgent need of applicants for subsistence assistance.

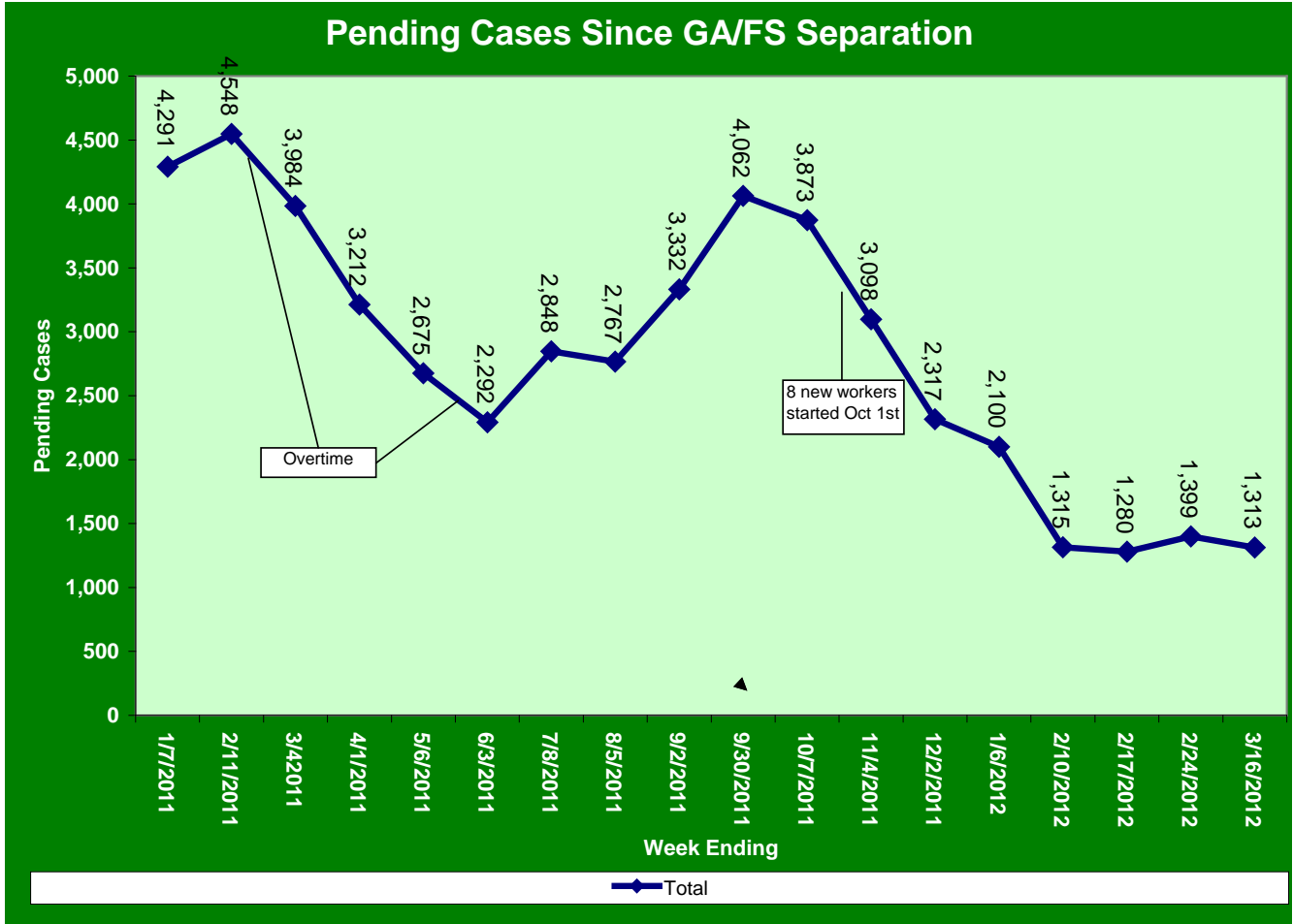
The current GA grant structure has a base allowance of \$234.93 per month. This base allowance is reduced by a \$40.00 deduction for medical coverage and \$25.00 deduction for the Regional Transit pass. The resulting maximum grant is \$169.93. The county is currently addressing pending litigation for failing to meet timely application processing timelines, demanding the cash value of bus passes and the \$40 deduction for County medical services under County Medically Indigent Services Program for the months the applicant had to wait for approval of benefits for which they were eligible.

	Base	Unfunded	Recommended	Percentage
Appropriations	4,236,111	526,967	3,709,144	12%
Reimbursements (-)	0	0	0	0.0%
Net Appropriations	4,236,111	526,967	3,709,144	12%
Revenues:				
Federal	0	0	0	0.0%
State	0	0	0	0.0%
Realignment	0	0	0	0.0%
Prop 172	0	0	0	0.0%
Fees	0	0	0	0.0%
Other	0	0	0	0.0%
Total Revenues	0	0	0	0.0%
Carryover	0	0	0	0.0%
Net Cost	4,236,111	526,967	3,709,144	12%
Fulltime Equivalent Positions	33.8	4.0	26.8	30%

**Program Impact:** To meet the targeted General Fund allocation for FY 2012/13, DHA will attempt to re-program the GA eligibility determination process to incorporate CalFresh activities into the time studying methodology of GA eligibility workers. Further studies will be conducted to determine the actual amount of time that can be attributed to the CalFresh program. At best, this may bring in sufficient CalFresh revenue to support 3.0 FTEs. Therefore, DHA proposes to eliminate 7.0 FTE Eligibility Specialist positions in the GA program. Three (3.0) of these positions will be formally transferred to the CalFresh Program and the remaining 4.0 positions will be deleted.

The reduction of these 7.0 positions will reduce County General Fund expenditures by \$526,967 in FY 2012-13 in the Operations budget (Budget Unit 8100) and will take the GA program back to Fiscal Year 2010-11 staffing levels. With this staffing reduction, DHA will not have sufficient personnel to adequately administer the GA Program. Based on recent experience, the department will likely be unable to meet eligibility determination time frames, leading to greater costs in the Aid Payments budget (Budget Unit 8700) and likely litigation.

In FY 2010-11, the Department made severe reductions to GA staffing to manage a \$2.1 million reduction in General Fund allocation, shifting 98.8 FTEs from the combined General Assistance/Food Stamp program to the Food Stamp-Only Program, now called "CalFresh." This reduction severely limited the Department's ability to process new GA applications, issue benefits timely, process annual redeterminations, and discontinue clients when they became ineligible. By January 2011, the Department had over 3,700 applications for General Assistance in a pending status (see chart below).



The high level of pending cases resulted in several writs and demand letters from legal advocates to make back payments for portions of the grants they did not receive while eligibility was pending.

In September 2011, the Board approved the addition of 8.0 Eligibility Specialists, paid for with unexpected one-time State closeout dollars from 2009. The new staff started in October 2011 and as a result pending applications dramatically declined to 1,246 in March 2012. Timeframes for benefit issuance, discontinuance, and annual redeterminations also improved. This has significantly reduced the County’s exposure to litigation.

It is DHA’s assessment that the current staffing is the minimum needed to maintain the pending applications and current caseload at a sufficient level to keep aid payments down and avoid litigation.

A decrease will once again lead to a backlog of applications and continuing cases where the employable applicant should be discontinued from the program after their maximum 90 days of eligibility. The application backlog and the inability to discontinue cases timely will increase costs in the Aid Payments budget. Prior to adding GA staff last year, the average grant amount had increased to \$194 because there were significant delays in processing applications and

because employable recipients continued to receive benefits beyond the time period for which they were eligible. With the staffing increase in October 2011, the average grant amount quickly dropped from \$194 to \$140. The Department has projected a savings in the 8700 (Aid Payments budget) which is predicated upon full staffing in the GA program. Any staffing reduction will likely reduce this savings.

The proposed reduction for FY 2012-13 will leave a total of 26.3 FTE Eligibility Specialists in the GA program. The average number of clients applying for GA fluctuates between a low of 2,600 and a high of 3,500 applications per month. With the proposed reduction, there will be only 19.0 Eligibility Specialists remaining to process applications, the remainder of the staff responsible for the on-going case maintenance of approximately 6,200 continuing cases. To keep up with the current volume of new applications, each worker would have to complete twenty-five intake interviews each day, an impossible expectation. At current staffing levels, the Department struggles to keep up with an expected eighteen intakes each day. The number of pending cases will again increase, as will the likelihood of litigation.

**Potential Impact on other Departments/Program Partners:** Inability to provide cash grants to eligible GA clients will likely result in more clients being homeless, put further stress on the homeless system of care and its providers, and expose the county to future litigation.