

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF STANISLAUS  
ACTION AGENDA SUMMARY

DEPT: COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY

BOARD AGENDA # \*B-14

Urgent \_\_\_\_\_ Routine X

AGENDA DATE September 18, 2001

CEO Concurs with Recommendation YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_  
(Information Attached)

4/5 Vote Required YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO X

SUBJECT:

AUTHORIZATION TO CHANGE COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS.

STAFF  
RECOMMEN-  
DATIONS:

1. AUTHORIZE THE CHANGING OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS TO ACCOMMODATE APPLICANT LIVING WITH PARENT.
2. AUTHORIZE THE CHANGING OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS TO ACCOMMODATE APPLICANT LIVING WITH ADULT OFFSPRING.
3. AUTHORIZE THE CHANGING OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS TO ACCOMMODATE APPLICANT LIVING IN A "SPOUSE-LIKE" SITUATION.

Staff Recommendations Continued on Page 2

FISCAL  
IMPACT:

The annual net cost of changing CSA's GA regulations would be approximately \$66,456. Appropriations and corresponding revenues are included in CSA's FY 2001/2002 Budget. Succeeding years will be included in the appropriate fiscal year CSA budget request.

Fiscal Impact Continued on Page 2

BOARD ACTION AS FOLLOWS:

No. 2001-714

On motion of Supervisor Simon, Seconded by Supervisor Caruso  
and approved by the following vote,

Ayes: Supervisors: Blom, Simon, Caruso, and Chair Paul

Noes: Supervisors: None

Excused or Absent: Supervisors: Mayfield

Abstaining: Supervisor: None

1) X Approved as recommended

2) \_\_\_\_\_ Denied

3) \_\_\_\_\_ Approved as amended

MOTION:

Christine Ferraro

ATTEST: CHRISTINE FERRARO TALLMAN, Clerk

By: Deputy

File No.

AUTHORIZATION TO CHANGE COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS.

Page 2

STAFF  
RECOMMEN  
DATIONS  
(Cont'd):

4. AUTHORIZE THE CHANGING OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS TO REDUCE DENIALS DUE TO VEHICLE VALUE.

FISCAL IMPACT  
(Cont'd):

The breakdown of costs by situation would be as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Annual Costs</u>
Applicant Living With Parent	\$24,960
Applicant Living With Adult Offspring	\$24,960
Applicant Living In A "Spouse-Like" Situation	\$12,480
Denials Due To Vehicle Value	<u>\$31,200</u>
Total	\$93,600

Approximately 29% of our GA cases receive full reimbursement from other aid programs and funding sources. Applying this reimbursement percentage to the additional \$93,600 per year will result in an offset of \$27,144, resulting in the net cost to the County of \$66,456.

Community Services Agency is proposing to change the General Assistance Regulations in four separate categories. The four categories are: Applicant Living With Parent, Applicant Living With Adult Offspring, Applicant Living In A "Spouse-Like" Situation and Denials Due To Vehicle Value.

DISCUSSION:

**Applicant Living With Parent**

Under current General Assistance regulations, any person applying for benefits in Stanislaus County who is residing with one or both of their parents, is subject to having that parent's non exempt income counted in determining eligibility. This most often makes them ineligible, even when the parent's income is minimum wage, or is derived from a pension. Only SSI/SSP and TANF funds are exempt. (See Attachment #1 for example)

This can force parents who, in most cases, have worked many years to earn a pension, to choose between spending funds they need for their own essentials or evicting their offspring. The policy can also be less than cost effective, as the applicant often will return to the program as a homeless person, entitled to a full grant, as opposed to a grant reduced by the shared housing rule. Homelessness is a detriment to safe and healthy existence for the applicant.

If changed, the General Assistance regulation will state that a person living with their parent(s) shall submit verification that they are required to pay for their own needs. This will include rent if they are required to pay.

# AUTHORIZATION TO CHANGE COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS.

Page 3

## DISCUSSION (Cont'd):

In all cases in which the person is required to pay rent the grant will be computed using the shared housing rule, which is based upon the number of adults in the home.

An applicant will not be ineligible because of the income of a parent unless case investigations confirm that the level of support voluntarily provided by the parent(s) exceeds the General Assistance standard of need.

Statistics indicate that an estimated four cases per month are currently denied based on the fact that their residence is with parent(s) who have income over the GA limit. Approximately two of these cases will follow requirements of the system and be approved, if the regulation relating to parental income is revised.

### **Applicant Living With Adult Offspring**

Under current General Assistance regulations, any person applying for benefits in Stanislaus County who is residing with one or more of their adult offspring, is subject to having their children's income counted in determining eligibility. They are usually found to be ineligible because the income, even if it is minimum wage, will exceed the GA benefit amount. Only SSI/SSP and TANF are exempt. (See Attachment #2 for example)

We believe that a change in General Assistance regulation is needed to correct this situation.

If changed, the General Assistance regulations would specify that an applicant residing with one or more of their adult offspring shall submit verification of the amount, if any, that they must pay toward their own support. The regulation will specify that an applicant receiving any item of need at no cost shall have the value of the item deducted from the grant.

In all cases in which the applicant is required to pay rent the rules governing "shared housing" will be in effect. This will reduce the grant, depending on the number of adults in the home.

### **Applicant Living In A "Spouse-Like" Situation**

Under current General Assistance regulations any person applying for General Assistance who reports that they are residing with another person in an arrangement deemed to be spouse-like has the income of the other person considered when eligibility for GA is determined.

In some instances this regulation being applied can cause needy and disabled people a denial of benefits needed to prevent homelessness or board and care placement. (See Attachment # 3 for example)

AUTHORIZATION TO CHANGE COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS.

Page 4

DISCUSSION  
(Cont'd):

If changed, the General Assistance regulations will allow benefits to be paid in cases where the roommate has no legal obligation for support.

We request to change the regulation to specify that any person residing with another adult must complete a statement of living arrangements form which will determine which, if any, items of need are supplied free of charge.

We would state in the regulation that any complete item of need, which is obtained at no cost, will be deducted from the grant. The grant will be computed based on the shared housing rule unless housing is furnished at no charge. The regulation will specify that no applicant will be denied benefits because they reside in a spouse-like living arrangement unless it is verified that enough support is voluntarily made available through this arrangement to exceed the General Assistance level of need.

Implementation of the proposed regulation change will assure that Stanislaus County is operating this portion of our General Assistance program in compliance with accepted practice, as demonstrated by a court decision within the state.

Statistics indicate the probability that one case a month that meets these criteria will be added to the program. As the average case stays active for about five months, this would add the monthly costs for about 60 months benefits for one person at an estimated cost of \$208 per month for each. The cost should be about \$12,480 for a full fiscal year.

Customers who might otherwise be homeless will be able to maintain relationships and housing when this sort of situation exists.

**Denials Due To Vehicle Value**

Under the current regulations a person applying for General Assistance in Stanislaus County is found to be ineligible if they own a motor vehicle with a value of more than \$1,000, regardless of encumbrances.

This amount is too low to allow an individual to retain a vehicle for transportation to medical appointments or for job search. The requirement that the value of a vehicle cannot exceed \$1,000 will sometimes cause a person to sell their car, use up the proceeds before going onto GA, and make them less able to find work and escape dependency. (see Attachment # 4)

We are requesting authorization from the Board to allow the General Assistance regulations to provide for an increase in the limit of value for a vehicle to \$2,000, after legal encumbrances. The car value limit would be raised to be more in line with current vehicle values and other assistance programs.

AUTHORIZATION TO CHANGE COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY GENERAL ASSISTANCE (GA) REGULATIONS.

Page 5

DISCUSSION  
(Cont'd):

For the proposed regulation change, any encumbrances claimed must be verified by a contract of sale and that the legal owner's name must be on the title.

If changed, the GA regulations will state that when a vehicle is sold, the customer must notify GA and must verify the amount acquired. The regulation will state that aid will be discontinued if the equity in the vehicle should exceed \$2,000 at the time of the annual renewal. The customer can rebut this finding with evidence that the equity does not exceed the limit.

We will have about two cases added to General Assistance each month. As the average case stays on aid five months, there would be 120 monthly benefit amounts added in a fiscal year. At the payment average of \$260, the estimated cost per year of this change is \$31,200.

The change will allow those who seek assistance, while in transition from recently ended employment to new jobs, to retain a working automobile. This also is essential in situations in which the person wants to move to another area for better employment opportunities.

The change will enable those who are receiving Interim Assistance while awaiting a decision on SSI to have an automobile to go to medical appointments.

POLICY  
ISSUE:

We are requesting authorization to change GA regulations to reflect the Board's priority of Safe, Healthy Communities.

STAFFING  
IMPACT:

None

## ATTACHMENT # 1

A mother in her seventies, with just over \$800 in Social Security income has a daughter in her fifties who is not yet old enough for SSI/SSP based on age and whom Social Security has not yet determined to be disabled enough for those benefits.

The daughter was in Board and Care placement, at county expense, awaiting Social Security's determination, but her condition deteriorated to the point that the Board and Care facility would no longer accept the responsibility for her care. As she was not yet approved for Social Security or Medi-Cal, which would eventually be available to pay for long term care placement, she came home to live with her mother.

The mother had worked for many years to qualify for her retirement payments, which were scarcely more than the SSI/SSP level. Had she not worked enough to earn Social Security benefits, she would have been eligible for SSI/SSP and current General Assistance regulations would have exempted her income, as per state law, making her daughter eligible for General Assistance to meet her needs. An eventual approval of Social Security would allow the County to recoup some or all of the benefits paid. The mother was forced to choose between abandoning her daughter or not having enough income to meet her own needs and ongoing obligations.

This is only one of the types of situations in which county residents in need are seriously disadvantaged by current regulations specifying that a parent is responsible for the needs of their adult offspring.

## **ATTACHMENT # 2**

A mother whose husband has abandoned her finds herself unable to maintain a residence on her own and moves in with her adult daughter. The daughter is going to school at MJC and is working at a fast food restaurant to supplement a partial education scholarship. She works about 90 hours per month.

Because the daughter's earned income is more than the current General Assistance allowance for two people, which is \$404 per month; the mother is not eligible to receive General Assistance while living with her daughter.

The result is that the mother must move out, becoming homeless, in order to secure enough income to live on, since the daughter is not able to meet her own obligations and support her mother. Once the mother becomes homeless, she can come onto GA and receive a grant. This situation contributes to the weakening of family relationships and endangers the health and safety of the applicant.

### ATTACHMENT # 3

A disabled woman moves into a residence with a man who is also disabled and who has Social Security (not SSI/SSP) income. She freely admits that he was her boyfriend at one time and that they are now living in an arrangement that would approximate a "spouse-like" arrangement.

Under General Assistance regulation, she would not be eligible to payment unless his income was less than \$404 per month, which is the maximum allowable income for two people under GA rules. On the other hand, if his income was from SSI/SSP, because he did not have enough lifetime earnings to be eligible to regular Social Security income, none of his income could be counted toward her support.

In this instance, as in many others, the General Assistance regulation that makes it necessary to count one person's income for another's support creates an inequitable situation for Stanislaus County residents.



#### ATTACHMENT # 4

A couple who had both been commissioned sales people both became disabled within a short period. Each of them had an automobile and although they had gone through all their savings and benefits before applying for GA, they had held onto the cars. He was nearing Social Security retirement age and would be eligible within a few months, while she stated her health was rapidly improving and she looked forward to going back to work soon.

The least expensive of their automobiles exceeded the GA limit and so they were not eligible if they retained either car. Because of this rule, they would not be eligible for even temporary relief while attempting to become employed again. They expressed that they were reluctant to sell either vehicle but that they would do so if necessary.

This is an example of how the regulation prevents, in some cases, the relief of people who have been contributors to the system and who just need temporary assistance. A higher limit would have allowed them to retain a form of transportation.