

General Relief Six-Month Time Limits Proposal

Introduction

This proposal will present a recommendation to modify the General Relief (GR) Program time limit to six months for all GR recipients. This proposed policy option can only be considered if the GR grant is being increased to \$342, which would align with the 1991 federal poverty line mandated by the Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 17000.5 The GR grant proposal will further explain the reasoning and goals of these recommendations.

Current Policy

GR employable participants are eligible to receive up to nine months of aid in a 12-month period if they are participating in an employment and training program. In Los Angeles County, employment and training is administered through the START Program. After receiving aid for nine months, a participant's GR benefits are discontinued, making them ineligible for further benefits for three months. Participants can continue to cycle in and out of the program indefinitely, if eligible. Los Angeles (LA) County is subject to the WIC 17000.6 and therefore, must have a time limit of at least six months on aid in a 12-month period.

WIC 17000.6

The county may not prohibit an employable individual from receiving aid under this part for less than six months in a 12-month period, whether or not the months are consecutive. If an employable individual has taken and continues to take all steps to apply for appropriate positions and has not refused an offer of employment without good cause, a county shall extend aid until the individual has received aid for nine months in a 12-month period.

Challenges

The challenge with the time limits policy is that it inadvertently encourages GR participants to become over dependent on the GR grant for nine months out of a 12-month period. Participants lose the sense of urgency in finding employment or another means of supporting themselves, because they know that they can rely on receiving cash aid for at least nine months and are free to reapply after 90 days and begin the cycle all over again. In the listening sessions organized by GR Program, community-based organizations and legal advocates shared their concerns that GR was not meant to be a permanent solution and understood that participants need to secure employment as a more permanent solution.

GR Program conducted an internal assessment of its time limits policy and determined that on average, approximately 23% of employable participants who become ineligible due to time limits, will reapply for GR benefits after 90 days. Participants' over-reliance on the GR Program is reflected in the year-over-year persistence of GR receipt data provided by the Chief Information Office (CIO). CIO concluded that 12.5% of the GR participants in a cohort they followed from 2010 to 2023 continued receiving aid on and off throughout the years.

Proposed New Policy and Goals

The proposed time limits policy will provide GR employable participants cash aid for six months in a 12-month period. The goal of the six months' time limit is to reduce the cash assistance reliance and encourage participants to utilize resources from the START Program to find employment and become self-sufficient. As stated above, the proposed policy is interdependent on increasing the GR grant to \$342, which will align with the 1991 federal poverty line mandated by WIC 17000.5, which will allow the county to change its time limits.

WIC 17000.5

The board of supervisors in any county may adopt a general assistance standard of aid, including the value of in-kind aid which includes, but is not limited to, the monthly actuarial value of up to forty dollars per month of medical care, that is 62 percent of a guideline that is equal to the 1991 federal official poverty line and may annually adjust that guideline in an amount equal to any adjustment. The adoption of a standard of aid pursuant to this section shall constitute a sufficient standard of aid.

Impact/Benefits

Participants will benefit from a GR grant increase as it will help them sustain their monetary needs while seeking suitable employment and become more self-sufficient. Although the proposed time limit will be reduced by three months, participants will still be receiving more cash aid on an annual basis. Additionally, the shorter time limit should also motivate the participants to take full advantage of the resources provided by START that will help them reach their goals towards self-reliance.

The Department will benefit from a decrease in GR and START caseloads due to longer breaks in aid for each participant. It will also reduce the number of GR re-applications, annual renewals and other types of supportive services provided by START and Eligibility staff. Smaller caseloads would also allow START Case Managers to focus on participants who are interested in building career pathways and assist them to find suitable and long-term employment.

This would benefit the County's public perception by encouraging its GR employable population to transition into the workforce and discourage their

reliance and dependency on cash aid. According to the California Department of Social Services, LA County has the largest GR population in California and is one of only two counties that have a nine-month time limit. Thirty-three counties have a three-month time limit, and thirteen counties don't have any time limits. These changes will still promote the County's duty to assist this vulnerable population by providing aid while still encouraging them to become self-sufficient, which was the intent of the program.

Cost

The costs associated with changing the GR time limit from nine to six months and increasing the GR grant amount to \$342 will increase the GR expenditures annually by 60% from \$289,929,000 to \$462,715,000 per the Department's Financial Management Division with the current time limits. Currently, the GR grant is \$221 per month for nine months, which totals \$1,989 per year for one participant. Under the proposed GR grant of \$342 with a six-month time limit, participants will receive a total amount of \$2,052 in aid per year, which is 3% higher than what they are currently receiving.

The change in policy will also require significant changes in CalSAWS logic incurring an additional cost.

Although increasing the GR grant will have an initial fiscal impact, the cost associated can be offset by reducing the timeframe employable participants will need START Program's services, decreasing the need for supportive services, and fewer ancillary and transportation issuances.

Recommended Next Steps

Upon approval, we will:

1. Share the proposal with County Counsel for review;
2. Draft the full proposals which will also include the fiscal analysis;
3. Share the full proposal with the Chief Executive Office and the Board Deputies for their review and approval;
4. Share approved proposals with the Workgroup(s);
5. Share proposals/recommendations coming out of the Workgroups with County Counsel again and Risk Management for their clearance;
6. Draft Board Letter with recommendations and submit for Executive staff's approval;
7. Upon the Department Head's approval, submit the proposal package to the Board for their approval; and
8. Draft approved policies, train staff on new policies/programs and develop a communications campaign to inform participants and the community about the policy change. Requests to change CalSAWS logic and revisions to Notices of Action will also need to be completed.

Decision: Approve Do Not Approve Let's Discuss