



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

March 14, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Mele Carroll, Chair
House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Patricia McManaman, Director

SUBJECT: **S.B. 1100 S.D.1 - RELATING TO THE GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Hearing: Thursday, March 14, 2013; 9:30 a.m.
Conference Room 329, State Capitol

PURPOSE: The purpose of S.B. 1100 S.D.1 is to allow the Department of Human Services (DHS) to draw from other funds appropriated to DHS in the event the General Assistance (HMS 204) appropriation is insufficient to meet General Assistance (GA) benefits payments.

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) strongly supports this Administration bill to allow the DHS to use savings in other programs of the Department to fund the shortfalls in the GA program due to caseload fluctuations.

The GA program (HMS 204), pursuant to section 346-53(b), Hawaii Revised Statutes, is a block grant program. GA is for the temporarily disabled and is intended as an interim assistance program to provide cash assistance either to those who have suffered a temporary illness or injury which prevents them from working, or to provide

such assistance to individuals with permanent disabilities until such time as they might start receiving federal disability benefits.

The maximum allowance a GA recipient may receive is determined by dividing the amount appropriated for GA payments by the Legislature in the State budget by the number of GA recipients. The DHS must adjust GA payments to remain within the appropriation when the caseload increases or decreases throughout the fiscal year.

For fiscal year 2011-2012, the payment level began at \$353, but due to caseload increases the benefit payment amount was reduced to \$319 in October 2011. The continual rise in caseload would have further reduced the payment to \$275 in April 2012, had the 2012 Legislature not approved an emergency assistance appropriation. In prior years, payment had been reduced to as low as \$234.

In the current fiscal year, the payment level began at \$319. However effective February 2013, the benefit payment amount will be reduced to \$298 due to the projected rise in the GA caseload. These reductions and fluctuations provide no stability to households that already live far below poverty levels. Stopping the benefit payment or reducing the amount of the benefit payment for these individuals poses a real threat to the individuals' health and safety. It is also almost certain to trigger increased homelessness.

To diminish the future need to request emergency appropriations and more importantly to stabilize payment levels to an extremely needy and vulnerable population, the Department proposes to utilize, when needed, savings from other programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill.



**LEGAL AID
SOCIETY OF HAWAII**

Telephone: (808) 536-4302 • Fax: (808) 527-8088
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 37375 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96837-0375
924 Bethel Street • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Calvin Pang, Esq.
President, Board of Directors

M. Nalani Fujimori Kaina, Esq.
Executive Director

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
SB1100 SD1 - RELATING TO THE GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Committee on Human Services - Room 329

Representative Mele Carroll, Chair
Representative Bertrand Kobayashi, Vice-Chair

March 14, 2013 at 9:30 a.m.

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii submits testimony in support of SB1100 SD1 – Relating to the General Assistance Program. This bill would allow the Department of Human Services to transfer unused funds from other programs when necessary to maintain a basic level of support for general assistance. General assistance is a program which provides financial assistance to disabled adults without children. The limited assistance that it provides can be critical to helping a disabled adult maintain housing or get access to basic necessities. It also provides a critical bridge for disabled adults who are seeking disability assistance from social security and upon award of social security; the state is repaid for the general assistance paid to the disabled adult.

Because general assistance is a block grant, assistance levels are determined based on the number of people in the community needing assistance. As these number rise (as they have over the last few years because of the economy), the assistance amount is reduced. The amount that we are talking about is fairly minimal, however the effect of reductions can be great. The amount started this year at \$319/month and was reduced effective February 1, 2013 to \$298/month because of the caseload.

This bill would allow the Department of Human Services to utilize savings from other programs to maintain benefit levels and not have to seek an emergency appropriation.

General Assistance is the safety net and without it, far more people would be facing homelessness and would not have hope to get themselves back on their feet. FDR once said, “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” I hope my support as a member of the Financial Assistance Advisory Council helps to provide just a little to those for whom the safety net was created.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

M. Nalani Fujimori Kaina
Executive Director

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii (Legal Aid) is the only legal service provider with offices on every island in the state, and in 2012 provided legal assistance to approximately 10,000 Hawai'i residents in the areas of consumer fraud, public assistance, family law, the prevention of homelessness, employment, protection from domestic violence, and immigration. Our mission is to achieve fairness and justice through legal advocacy, outreach and education for those in need.



www.legalaidhawaii.org
A UNITED WAY AGENCY



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1100 SD1: Relating to the General Assistance Program

TO: Representative Mele Carroll, Chair, Representative Bertrand Kobayashi, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee on Human Services

FROM: Trisha Kajimura, Social Policy Director, Catholic Charities Hawaii

Hearing: Thursday, March 14, 2013, 9:30 am; CR 329

Thank you for the opportunity to testify **in support of SB 1100**, which allows the Department of Human Services (DHS) to draw from other funds appropriated to DHS in the event the General Assistance (HMS 204) appropriation is insufficient to meet General Assistance benefits payments.

Catholic Charities Hawaii (CCH) is a tax exempt, non-profit agency that has been providing social services in Hawaii for over 60 years. CCH has programs serving families, elders, children, developmentally disabled, homeless and immigrants. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy for the most vulnerable of the people in Hawaii.

People receiving General Assistance (GA) benefits are typically living in dire financial circumstances and unable to afford the minimum necessities of hygiene, medical care and food. GA provides minimal monthly payments to the temporarily disabled or the permanently disabled that are waiting for their federal benefits to commence. The amount of GA payments is already extremely low and when DHS is forced to lower the payments, the quality of life to beneficiaries dips to inhumane levels.

This bill will allow DHS to avoid lowering GA benefit payments by drawing on other funds available. DHS will no longer be tied to administering the GA program strictly from the federal block grant that funds it. This will provide for greater stability for GA recipients.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. **We urge your support for SB 1100**. Please contact me at (808)527-4810 or trisha.kajimura@catholiccharitieshawaii.org if you have any questions.



CLARENCE T. C. CHING CAMPUS • 1822 Ke'eaumoku Street, Honolulu, HI 96822
Phone (808)527-4810 • trisha.kajimura@catholiccharitieshawaii.org



kobayashi1-Joni

From: Joel Fischer [jfischer@hawaii.edu]
Sent: Monday, March 11, 2013 1:04 PM
To: HUS testimony
Subject: SB1100; HUS; March 14

Categories: Green Category

HUS

March 14, 2013

SB1100; Relating to GA Program

PLEASE PASS THIS BILL!

For too long, our disabled citizens have been treated like second class citizens. How else could one explain the pathetic, demeaning level of cash support provided by the state? It is wrong; it is immoral; HEWA!!

GA recipients are trapped in the outdated block grant appropriation mentality that historically was developed in a state emergency, but no longer is relevant.

Please give DHS some additional flexibility in providing assistance to our disabled citizens on GA, which has now sunk to LESS THAN \$300 per MONTH!! How can anyone be expected to survive with such a paltry amount of money?

Our GA clients needs help. Please pass this bill.

Thank you.

Aloha, joel

Dr. Joel Fischer, ACSW
Professor (Ret.)
University of Hawai`i, School of Social Work
Honolulu, HI 96822