

H.B. NO. 869

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. Section 346-53, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
2 amended by amending subsection (b) to read as follows:

3 "(b) The director shall determine the allowance for
4 general assistance to households without minor dependents based
5 upon the total amount appropriated for general assistance to
6 households without minor dependents, and other funds
7 appropriated to the department of human services, among other
8 relevant factors."

9 SECTION 2. Section 346-71, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
10 amended by amending subsection (e) to read as follows:

11 "(e) Within the limitations of this section, the
12 department shall by rules adopted pursuant to chapter 91,
13 determine:

14 (1) The allowance for general assistance to households
15 without minor dependents [~~based upon the total amount~~
16 ~~appropriated for general assistance to households~~
17 ~~without minor dependents;~~] pursuant to section 346-
18 53 (b) ;

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- 1 (2) A method for determining assistance amounts; and
2 (3) Other necessary provisions to implement general
3 assistance to households without minor dependents."

4 SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
5 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

6 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

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INTRODUCED BY: 
BY REQUEST

JAN 22 2013

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Report Title:

Department of Human Services; General Assistance Program

Description:

Allows the Department of Human Services to draw from other funds appropriated to the Department of Human Services to maintain the level of General Assistance benefits payments set at the beginning of each fiscal year for the entire fiscal year.

The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.

HB869

JUSTIFICATION SHEET

DEPARTMENT: Human Services

TITLE: A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO THE GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

PURPOSE: To better allow the Department of Human Services to maintain, on a monthly basis, the general assistance benefit levels that are set at the beginning of each fiscal year based on the caseload and authorized appropriation for the general assistance program.

MEANS: Amend sections 346-53(b) and 346-71(e), Hawaii Revised Statutes.

JUSTIFICATION: The general assistance program (HMS 204), pursuant to section 346-53(b), Hawaii Revised Statutes, is a block grant program. The maximum allowance a general assistance recipient may receive is determined by dividing the amount of the appropriation for GA payments authorized by the Legislature in the State budget by the number of general assistance recipients. The Department of Human Services must adjust GA payments to remain within the GA appropriation when the caseload increases or decreases through out the fiscal year.

For the 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 benefit payment would have had to been further reduced to \$275 in April 2012, without the approval of the emergency appropriation for GA benefit payments by the 2012 Legislature. In prior years, payments had been reduced to as low as \$234 as caseloads increased.

These reductions and fluctuations provide no stability to households who already live

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 reduce the future need to request emergency appropriations for the GA program, the Department proposes to utilize, when needed, savings from other departmental programs. This bill would allow the Department of Human Services to use savings in other programs of the Department to fund the shortfalls in the GA program due to caseload fluctuations.

Impact on the public: The Department will be able to maintain, on a monthly basis, the general assistance benefit levels that are set at the beginning of each fiscal year based on the caseload and authorized appropriation for the general assistance program.

Maintaining the benefit level at a stable amount to eligible disabled individuals will prevent potential harm to these individuals' health and safety.

Impact on the department and other agencies: Reduction in benefits may cause an increase in services requested from other public and private agencies.

GENERAL FUND: None.

OTHER FUNDS: None.

PPBS PROGRAM DESIGNATION: HMS 204.

OTHER AFFECTED AGENCIES: None.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon approval.