

S.B. NO. 2840

JAN 23 2014

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. The department of human services shall submit
5 to the legislature a report detailing the funds used and
6 calculations made for general assistance to households without
7 minor dependents pursuant to section 346-71, Hawaii Revised
8 Statutes, for fiscal year 2014-2015 no later than twenty days
9 prior to the convening of the regular session of 2016.

10 SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
11 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

12 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

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INTRODUCED BY: 

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BY REQUEST

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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.

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 (GA) 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 throughout the fiscal year.

Emergency appropriations were requested in 2011 and 2012 to prevent reducing monthly benefit payments below \$300. An emergency appropriation was not requested in fiscal year 2013 and as a result benefits were reduced to \$298 a month. Since 2007 payments have fluctuated from a high of \$469 to a low of \$234 in April of 2009 and have been adjusted eight times since 2007. These reductions and fluctuations provide no stability to households who already live below poverty levels. Currently, the monthly benefit payment for fiscal year 2013-2014 is \$319.

To reduce the future need to request emergency appropriations for the GA program, and to maintain a reasonable monthly assistance payment, the Department proposes to utilize, when needed, savings from other departmental programs. Section 17-678-3, Hawaii Administrative Rules, specifies that the monthly assistance payment is to help with basic needs such as personal essentials, household expenses, and shelter but current payment levels are too low to cover any reasonable shelter costs. This bill would allow the Department of Human Services to use savings in other programs of the Department to maintain a reasonable benefit level in the GA program.

Maintaining a minimum benefit level for basic needs will provide stability to this vulnerable population who are unemployable and suffering from a mental or physical disability.

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.

The constant reductions and fluctuations in the benefit payment pose a real threat to individuals' health and safety. It is also almost certain to trigger increased homelessness.

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.