

DOUGLAS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL ASSISTANCE

Health & Human Services Committee

11/21/17

STATUTORY REQUIREMENT AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Chapter 68 of the Nebraska Statutes requires counties to provide for the poor of the county who are not eligible for any other governmental assistance and do not have a parent, stepparent, or spouse responsible for their support. These statutory requirements are the basis for the programs administered by the Department of General Assistance, which are considered to be "programs of last resort." Financial assistance provided through this program may include rent, mortgage payments, utilities, clothing and non-food items. Out-of-county transportation is provided in certain situations. Assistance is limited to those persons in Douglas County between the ages of nineteen and sixty-four who are not eligible for other public assistance and/or do not have sufficient income or resources to meet all or part of their shelter needs.

GUIDELINE REVIEW

In August and September we mailed out forum invites to over 400 landlords, 190 medical providers, the MACCH list served (emailed), 23 crematories/mortuaries and over 500 clients. We hosted two Public Forums on September 25th, 2017 and opened the Public Hearing on October 3, 2017. In addition we held an internal Guideline Review meeting with our staff to obtain suggestions as well. A current copy of the Guidelines are at each of the local libraries, the Sheriff's office, DC Primary Health Care Clinic, the Commissioner's office, City Clerk offices of Waterloo, Bennington and Valley.

The following areas have been a topic of conversation during the Guideline Review process:

RENT

Current Language:

Dwelling Unit/Shelter Definitions: Payment Schedule

1) Residential Unit - For General Assistance purposes, a residential unit is defined as a self-contained dwelling unit which has a separate secure entrance, separate cooking and food storage facilities and a separate bathroom.

Additionally, there must be a sink large enough to accommodate dish washing. A residential unit may be rented to related or unrelated individuals. Total residential unit rent is one rate for the self-contained dwelling unit. The maximum shelter allowance is \$500.00 for an applicant/recipient or married couple.

2) Boarding/Rooming House - For General Assistance purposes, a dwelling unit in which the applicant(s)/recipient(s) has/have a sleeping room and must share as common areas a minimum of one of the following: entrance, cooking and food storage facilities and/or bathroom facilities. Total dwelling unit rent is not one rate for the premises, as in a residential unit, but is a "sleeping room" rate. This includes a Boarding/Rooming House as defined in Nebraska Revised Statutes 41-204 and 41-205 (as amended). The maximum shelter allowance shall be \$300.00 for an applicant/recipient or a married couple.

3) Shared Living - For General Assistance purposes, "shared living" is defined as a living arrangement in which the applicant/recipient or married couple shares a residential unit as defined above, with the property owner. The maximum shelter allowance shall be \$250.00 for an applicant/recipient or a married couple.

Proposed Change:

The overall consensus was that there is currently no justification for a rent increase. Over 1,000 clients, landlords, providers and community agencies were informed of the Guideline Review and we only heard from one landlord requesting an increase to rent. The same landlord came during the last Guideline Review as well to request an increase. We did not hear from any local agencies such as Heartland Family Services, Community Alliance, Together, Francis

House Apartments or Salvation Army about concerns with the amount of rent we can authorize like we have in the past. Last year we increased the maximum rent allowance 25%, from \$400 to \$500. Our department also completed a rent survey, where we survey rentals property that are east of 72nd street. We found that the average rent for a studio or one bedroom apartment for the area we surveyed was \$504.06 per month. We found that some of the properties that were advertising a monthly rent higher than \$500 were current landlords accepting the GA amount of \$500 a month for our clientele that live there. We also contacted MUD and OPPD requesting information about any potential increases, OPPD claimed there would be no increase while MUD said the max they would increase would be 2%.

SPECIALIZED HOUSING NEED

Current Language:

Specialized Housing Need : Individuals who have a verified physical and/or mental health condition which necessitates a specialized housing need may be authorized a supplemental shelter allowance, not to exceed \$125.00 per month, provided the individual cannot obtain housing which will meet his/her specialized need without such supplement.

Proposed Change:

We are proposing an increase to the Specialized Housing need. We would like to increase this amount to \$200 in addition to having more flexibility to authorize it. For example, clients who are working with Heartland Family Services may be living in a home for \$550 that HFS has been paying for them as part of the programing. But when the client is closed out of the HFS program and GA would take over rent payments, the client would be forced to relocate if the landlord isn't willing to accept the \$500 GA is able to pay, in this situation we could authorize paying \$50 more a month under the Specialized Housing Need. There are also some rentals that charge the client extra each month if the clients want to run their AC in the summer months, we would like to be able to authorize an increase to their rent during the summer months to cover AC when necessary.

INCOME DISREGARD

Current Language:

Exempt Income: The following income shall be disregarded when determining the amount of assistance which the client is eligible to receive:

fifty (50) percent of a newly employed recipient's gross earned income may be disregarded for a period not to exceed three (3) consecutive months of full pay, provided that the recipient has been employed less than full time and has received shelter or medical assistance during any of the three (3) most recent months.

Proposed Change:

We would like to completely disregard 100% of their earned income for 2-3 months once a client gains employment. This will allow a client to save some money, pay overdue bills, buy essentials, etc. Our hope as this will help incentive our clients to gain employment and no longer need assistance. Clients have expressed to us that once they get a job they are just "kicked off the program", this will hopefully alleviate some fear and help incentivize clients to obtain employment.

EXEMPT RESOURCES

Current Language:

Exempt Resources: The following resources shall not be considered in determining an applicant's eligibility for general assistance.

- a) \$35,000.00 of equity in a primary residence owned by the applicant;
- b) household furnishings;
- c) one vehicle which is presently being used to meet the applicant's transportation needs and which has an equity value of less than \$5,000.00. In the case of a married couple, two (2) vehicles which are operable and presently being used to

meet the transportation needs of the household, which have a combined equity value not to exceed \$7,000.00. In cases where the equity value exceeds \$5,000.00; or, in the case of a married couple, \$7,000.00, assistance may be authorized for up to thirty (30) days to allow sufficient time to sell the vehicle(s) and reduce the equity value. Proceeds from the sale shall be considered income to the household at the time of sale;

d) burial lots;

e) life insurance policy/policies with a combined cash value equal to the maximum expenses permitted for an adult county burial as specified in Chapter 6, herein. Cash value in excess of this exemption shall be considered a resource to the client, provided that no exemption shall be allowed on requests for county burial

f) Indian Lease Land.

Proposed Change:

Exempt Resources:

c) vehicle-we are looking at two options: 1) exempting the primary vehicle no matter what the equity value is (NDHHS currently follows this rule). 2) increase the equity value to \$7,000

NON-FOOD(Dollar General Gift Cards)

Current Language:

Non-Food Necessities: Non-food necessities are defined as items needed for personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness; i.e. toilet paper, cleaning products, laundry detergent, shampoo, bath soap, deodorant, toothbrush, toothpaste, paper towels, broom, dust pan, etc. Items considered inappropriate are tobacco and tobacco products, alcoholic beverages, food items, pet food, magazines, etc.

Non-Food Maximum Allowances

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>Allowance</u>
1	\$25.00
2	\$40.00

Group Living Facility: Persons residing in a group living facility, such as a shelter, where some but not all housekeeping aids and/or toiletries are not uniformly or consistently available.

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>Allowance</u>
1	\$20.00
2	\$25.00

Proposed Change:

We would like to give \$25 merchandise(Dollar General) cards to all eligible clients no matter their household size or where they happen to reside.

Maximum Potential Effect on budget: 375(highest amount per month last FY) eligible to receive merchandise cards. 375 X \$5 = \$1875 month, \$1875 x 12= \$22,500 year. We also always have unclaimed merchandise cards each month.