

## Health and Human Services Committee Meeting

### Douglas County, Nebraska

Tuesday, November 21, 2017

The meeting convened at 8:00 A.M. in Room 903 of the Omaha-Douglas Civic Center, 1819 Farnam Street, Omaha, NE 68183. A copy of the Open Meetings Act is located on the wall near the entrance of the room. A notice of the meeting was published in the November 14, 2017, issue of *The Daily Record*. County Commissioners present at the meeting were Clare Duda, Marc Kraft, and P.J. Morgan. Others present at the meeting included Patrick Bloomingdale, Joe Lorenz and Diane Carlson, Administration; Deb Redding and Melissa Sewick, General Assistance; and Constance Mierendorf, Douglas County Clerk/Comptroller's office. Commissioner Duda chairs the Committee.

A video recording of the meeting is available on the Douglas County Website:

<http://commissioners.douglasCounty-ne.gov/board-meetings/videos>.

#### **Revisions to General Assistance/Primary Healthcare Network Guidelines**

- Commissioner Duda introduced Deb Redding, Department Director, who presented the General Assistance Guideline Review (Attachment A).
- Ms. Redding said Melissa Sewick sent out 1,000 invitations to 2 Public Forums on General Assistance (GA) where the public could make suggestions. One landlord and one client participated. GA has not received emails or any communication expressing dissatisfaction with the program.
- Last year, GA raised the rent allowance to \$500.
- **Rent:** GA did a survey of apartments for rent and found that the average rent is \$504. Since the current allowance is \$500, no rent increase is requested at this time.
- **Specialized Housing Need:** The current allowance is \$125 per month. This is for individuals who have a verified physical and/or mental health condition, which necessitates a specialized housing accommodation. GA would like the allowance to be increased to \$200 and have more flexibility to authorize it. Some landlords charge a client extra if the client runs the air conditioner in the summer months and GA would like to be able to authorize an increase in a client's rent during the summer months to cover this.
- **Income Disregard:** When a client becomes newly employed, the amount of assistance that client is eligible to receive currently disregards 50% of a client's gross earned income for a period of 3 months. GA would like to disregard 100% of their earned income for 3 months.
- Commissioner Duda agreed that this was reasonable given that many of the newly employed would be earning minimum wage.

- Exempt Resources: Currently, a vehicle with a value of \$5,000 or less is exempt from consideration for qualifying benefits. GA proposed 2 options: 1) exempting the primary vehicle no matter what the equity value (this is the practice of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services) or 2) increase the equity value to \$7,000.
- Commissioner Duda said he liked the idea of exempting the vehicles altogether.
- NON-FOOD (Dollar General Gift Cards): The Gift Cards account for necessities for personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness. Currently, the Gift Cards' value is determined by household size and whether clients are living in a group living facility. Those living in a non-group setting are allowed \$25.00 for 1 person and \$40.00 for 2 people. Those living in a group living facility are allowed \$20.00 for 1 person and \$25.00 for 2.
- GA proposes to give \$25 Dollar General Gift Cards to all eligible clients no matter what their household size is or where they reside.
- Joe Lorenz asked how many clients received General Assistance and Ms. Redding replied that 1500 do.
- Commissioner Duda said he liked the proposed changes.
- Patrick Bloomingdale asked that the map illustrating GA approved cases (Attachment B) be revised to include streets. Unfortunately, the same zip codes seem to have the highest concentrations of cases every year.

The meeting adjourned at 8:14 A.M.