SUMMARY

This brief summarizes the General Assistance (GA) Program at the Department of Workforce Services (DWS), its related functions and funding. The brief is for informational purposes only and no Legislative action is required; however, it serves to inform the Legislature regarding possible policy decisions relating to GA funding.

BACKGROUND

The General Assistance Program provides minimal financial assistance to single or married individuals 18 and older without dependent children who have physical or mental health limitations and, in some cases, both. These limitations most often prevent GA or potential GA clients from working. The program is intended to serve one of the most vulnerable populations by providing cash assistance that can help with non-food purchases (cannot be purchased with Food Stamp benefits) and, in many instances, helps them qualify for housing assistance. Another program benefit includes help with Primary Care Network (PCN) enrollment fees and prescription co-pays.

The original intention of the General Assistance Program was to provide limited financial benefits while at the same time assisting customers to increase their income either through employment or by assistance with the application for long-term disability benefits through Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). In this regard, GA continues to offer financial assistance for up to six months to individuals who are impaired with short-term disabilities. The program now also includes assistance for persons with more long-term disabilities, who according to a certified health care professional, have a documented impairment that prevents participation in regular work activities.

In cases of persons with documented, long-term disabilities, the General Assistance Program assists the individuals up to 12 months and helps them apply for SSI or SSDI. Social Security Disability Insurance pays benefits to disabled individuals and certain members of their family if they are "insured," meaning that they worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes. Supplemental Security Income is a Federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues, not Social Security taxes, and helps individuals with disabilities who have little or no income. Following an initial eligibility determination process, DWS provides these customers, who comprise approximately 82% of total GA clients, with case management services throughout the process of applying for SSI or SSDI. GA case managers utilize the SOAR Model (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery) to optimize results and reduce the amount of time to get a determination from the Social Security Administration long-term cases.

BUDGET AND ANALYSIS

The General Assistance Program provides maximum monthly benefits of up to $261 for an individual or $362 for a married couple. The average monthly issuance is approximately $240. The average monthly caseload in FY 2010 was 923 cases; 410 cases were approved for SSI/SSDI and closed from GA in FY 2010 before reaching the 12-month benefit time limit. Many GA cases go on to be approved for SSI/SSDI after the case has been closed due to the benefits time limit of 12 months being met.

The total average cost per GA case in FY 2010 was $2,491, with total cost including the following: Administration - $431, Eligibility - $312, and Case Management - $1,748. DWS also receives reimbursements on benefits for cases that are approved for SSI. The average reimbursement per case in FY 2010 was approximately $115 with a total reimbursement of $1,268,840.
DWS Reporting on Administration Costs for General Assistance

The table below includes the administrative costs over the past four fiscal years, as reported by DWS.

| GENERAL ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION COSTS, FY 2007-2011 |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Region Costs (1)                             | 2007     | 2008     | 2009     | 2010     |
|                                               | $4,384,025 | $3,005,735 | $3,129,884 | $1,901,960 |
| Admin Costs (2)                              | $1,168,494 | $820,731  | $780,401  | $398,056  |
| Client Payments (3)                          | $4,251,775 | $3,918,481 | $4,318,419 | $2,977,992 |
| Avg. Monthly Caseload                        | 1,367     | 1,257     | 1,398     | 923       |
| Admin as a pct. Of Client pmts               | 27.5%     | 20.9%     | 18.1%     | 13.4%     |
| Admin. Costs per case                        | $854.79   | $652.93   | $558.23   | $431.26   |

General Assistance Funding History

Funding for the General Assistance Program is shown below. The program budget has been reduced since FY 2009 according to the following:

- FY 2007 - $10.4 million
- FY 2008 - $9.4 million
- FY 2009 - $10.2 million
- FY 2010 - $5.2 million
- FY 2011 - $4.6 million

Items for Consideration

1. The General Assistance Program was originally intended as a program to provide limited financial assistance during the process of helping clients achieve employed status—considered as “short-track” program participants. What role does the Legislature want DWS to play in providing case management services to long-term customers? Currently 82% of GA clients fall into the long-term category.

2. In measuring costs of the program, how should the inputs by DWS (administration, eligibility, case management) be weighed against the outputs (monthly benefits)? Is case management considered a service or product? Is it administration and should it be considered in the costs of administration?

3. What are the services that should be provided dependent upon funding levels?