



Monterey County

Item No.

Board Report

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Legistar File Number: BC 22-121

August 31, 2022

Introduced: 8/17/2022

Current Status: Agenda Ready

Version: 1

Matter Type: Budget Committee

Receive and accept the semi-annual report of expenditures and caseload data for the Department of Social Services for the period of January through June 2022.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Budget Committee:

Receive and accept the semi-annual report of expenditures and caseload data for the Department of Social Services for the period of January through June 2022.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

The attached report represents actual caseload and expenditure data through June 2022. The report compares data month-to-month and year-to-year for three years for the following programs:

General Assistance (GA) caseload slightly increased from 204 in December 2021 to 207 in June 2022. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average decrease of -38.65%. This decrease in caseload occurred while applications for GA benefits remained strong. During the active phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the State allowed people to apply for GA benefits telephonically. While this provided the customer with a level of safety against the virus, it consequently led to a high denial rate for applicants. The GA eligibility process is complicated and without the face-to-face guidance of an Eligibility Worker, many applicants were non-compliant with program requirements and were therefore denied GA benefits. Now that we are in the recovery phase of the pandemic, a concerted effort is being made to work more face-to-face with customers and guide them directly through the application process. The above noted increase in cases from December to June indicates the success of this effort. The Department continues outreach efforts to partner agencies, providing formal presentations and information on the GA program. With increased in-person servicing of applicants and expanded outreach, the GA caseload is expected to continue the growth trajectory experienced in the first half of 2022.

Additional reasons for caseload declines include an initiative to assist GA eligible customers more aggressively in applying for SSI which provides a higher benefit than GA. The GA caseload has also decreased as some customers have timed out of the program due to the 6-month program requirements for participants that the Board adopted in 2018 where the participants can only receive benefits for 6 months annually. Pandemic-related cost of living increases has also become an issue, as Monterey County has become a net out migration county regarding Inter County Transfers (ITC), meaning more program-eligible customers transferred to other counties than have moved here. Overall assistance costs reflect a decrease of -55.99% from a year-to-year perspective (see attached chart, Page 1).

CalWORKS caseload slightly increase from 2,507 in December 2021 to 2,567 in June 2022, an increase of 60 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average decrease of -9.53%. As with the GA caseload discussed above, CalWORKS cases were affected due to a decreased in-person contact during the pandemic. The recent increase in CalWORKS cases in the first half of 2022 is similar to that seen with GA cases and is correlated to the same increase in face-to-face contact with customers. We expect this trend to continue. Another factor for the overall decline in the caseload over the last year was a direct result of the pandemic economic stimulus payments and enhanced unemployment benefits, which made many customers ineligible for benefits due to income level. As these benefits conclude, more people will return to eligibility and the caseload is predicted to increase. While positive, it is unclear what the low unemployment rate and a strong labor market are having, but it is reasonable to assume this may also decrease the CalWORKS caseload. As the labor market softens, we expect a corresponding increase in cases. This reporting period reflects a higher monthly caseload than the previous report period, ending the year.

The Assistance costs, on average, from year-to-year, decreased -3.4%; however, in comparing this reporting period to the prior report period, expenditures in the 2nd half of the year are approximately \$2.2 million higher due to the grant increase in October 2021 and the increase in caseload. In the upcoming report period, the remaining funds from the Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund were issued in July 2022. A scheduled 21% grant increase will be occurring on October 1st. When put in place, this will have the secondary effect of increasing the eligible pool of CalWORKS customers (see attached chart, page 2).

CalFresh caseload increased from 16,485 in December 2021 to 17,882 in June 2022, an increase of 1,417 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, there is a slight average increase in caseload of 1.91%. CalFresh Applications are approved 100% within 30 days, and staff are at 96% for issuing expedited benefits within three days. Community Benefits processed approximately 11,522 applications during this reporting period.

Our County has received strong praise from the California Department of Social Services and other counties are reaching out to us about our processes. Although the Department didn't have a perfect score on the 30-day processing over the last three fiscal years, the Department continues to exceed the State's expectation of 90% for processing emergency CalFresh benefits in 3-days (see attached chart, page 3).

Medi-Cal caseload increased from 83,931 in December 2021 to 86,490 in June 2022, an increase of 3,513 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average increase of 6.26%. The increase in caseload results from the State directing counties not to process redeterminations on eligibility due to the pandemic. When the State lifts this hold, it will be a huge workload impact on our workers. Approximately 191,986 individuals (3,513 increase from last report period) receive Medi-Cal health insurance through the Department of Social Services public assistance eligibility systems. In May 2022, the Department accelerated enrollment for adults and eligibility for undocumented adults over the age of 50 to full-scope benefits (see attached chart, page 3).

Community Benefits has three lobbies (Salinas, Seaside, and King City). The foot traffic was reduced substantially during the pandemic sheltering in. Customers were encouraged to apply by phone, online, fax, or as a last resort, in person. In FY 2021-22, lobby activity has tripled from FY 2020-21 but not as high as in pre-pandemic years. To prepare for the increased foot traffic that will be caused by the State when they direct counties to begin re-determinations on Medi-Cal benefits, Community Benefits is piloting a new "Frontline" process that streamlines the way they assist their customers thereby being more efficient and reducing customer wait time.

Community Benefits has a caseload of 113,915, serving 243,779 individuals in Monterey County, which is 56% of the population. Of these individuals, 127,254 are adults and 116,525 are children.

IHSS paid hours have increased from 565,153 in December 2021 to 609,157 in June 2022, an increase of 44,004 hours and an average annual increase of 7.36%. The IHSS wages and benefits have increased 18.15% from FY 2020-21 due to the increase in hours worked for this reporting period which drives the costs for wages and benefits along with Board-approved increases for wages and health. There is no wait list for health benefits. The following was approved over this last fiscal year: On March 1, 2022 health benefits increased by \$0.18 per hour for a total of \$0.66 per hour; a wage supplemental of \$0.60 per hour for a total wage of \$16.89. The next increase does not go into effect till July 1, 2023 (see attached chart, page 4).

Out of Home Care includes cases in Foster Care (including youth opting to stay in Foster Care to age 21), Probation, and Adoption Assistance. The caseload slightly decreased from 1,082 in December 2021 to 1,048 in June 2022, a decrease of 34 cases from the last report period. The average caseload year-to-year decreased -7.91%, and expenditures decreased -9.70%. The decrease is attributable to setting up more guardianships (permanency) along with fewer children entering the system; however, over the last three months of this reporting period, we are seeing expenditures growing compared to last year at this time which is attributable to some more challenging and higher cost placements.

The attached chart, page 5, reflects the reasons that children exit foster care placements.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Probation placement costs are included in Foster Care.

FINANCING:

Caseload trends still reflecting impacts from the pandemic resulting in slightly lower expenditures in CalWORKs, General Assistance, and Out of Home Care than was built in the FY 2021-22 Adopted Budget. Sufficient appropriations and County General Fund contributions are currently available.

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Attachments: Jan-Jun 2022 Caseload and Expenditure Report