



# County of Monterey

**Item No.**

## Board Report

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

**Legistar File Number: BC 24-102**

**August 30, 2024**

**Introduced:** 8/16/2024

**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 2024.

### 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 2024.

### SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

The attached report represents actual caseload and expenditure data through June 2024.

The report compares data month-to-month and year-to-year for three years for the following programs:

- **General Assistance (GA)** caseload increased from 349 in December 2023 to 447 in June 2024, an additional 98 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average increase of 38.9%. This increase 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 Specialist, 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 over the last twelve months 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 over the last twelve months. Overall, assistance costs reflect an increase of 25.08% from a year-to-year perspective which correlates to the percentage caseload increase of 38.9%. This is a County-only funded program. (See attached chart, Page 1).
- **CalWORKs** caseload increased from 3,564 in December 2023 to 3,665 in June 2024, an increase of 101 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average increase of 19.5%. The increase may have been driven by the expiration of pandemic related payments in 2021 causing individuals to be ineligible to CalWORKs benefits, the subsequent grant payment increases that occurred 2022 to present, increased income limit for applicants effective July 1, 2024, and departmental outreach efforts. The Assistance costs, on average, from year-to-year, increased 21.29%; and this report period is higher in comparison to

the same point in time last fiscal year. This is a direct result of the caseload increasing and the maximum aid grant payment increased 3.6% October 1, 2023. (See attached chart, Page 2).

- **CalFresh** caseload continues to increase from 22,068 in December 2023 to 23,174 in June 2024, an increase of 1,106 cases which may be attributed to continuous outreach from community partners and the Department along with the increased cost of food and needs in the community. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an increase in caseload of 8.39% which reflects a typical increase during the winter months. CalFresh Applications were approved 100% within 30 days, and staff are at 94.5% for issuing expedited benefits within three days (See attached chart, Page 3).
- **Medi-Cal** caseload increased slightly from 85,635 in December 2023 to 86,141 in June 2024, a total of 506 cases. The slight increase is largely due to outreach efforts. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average decrease of -2.3%. The Department was required to begin processing annual redeterminations as of April 1, 2023, which offsets the number of new applicants approved. This continues to be a huge workload impact for our Community Benefits staff while also handling their regular ongoing workload. (See attached chart, Page 3).
- Community Benefits has three lobbies (Salinas, Seaside, and King City). Customers are encouraged to apply by phone, online, fax, or as a last resort, in person. The foot traffic in the lobbies and the calls received/answered at the Call Center have increased significantly in the past couple of years. Recently, Community Benefits implemented a Self-Service Center at the Salinas Life Foundation Building to teach customers how to utilize online services and continues to strategize how to streamline “Frontline” processes to assist customers, thereby being more efficient and reducing customer wait time. Community Benefits serves over 250,000 individuals in Monterey County, which is 58% of Monterey County’s population.
- **IHSS** paid hours has increased from 650,189 in December 2023 to 700,629 in June 2024, an increase of 50,440 hours. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average increase of 8.19% of hours. As the population ages and lives longer, those on IHSS have increased needs the longer they stay in the program, so hours will fluctuate and increase as caseload grows. Additionally, recent expansions to the Medi-Cal program as well as those occurring over the last few years have increased the overall number of individuals eligible for IHSS. This includes younger disabled individuals and members of the undocumented community. The IHSS wages and benefits (expenditures) have increased 14.09% from FY 2022-23 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 once again a caregiver waitlist for health benefits since the County has reached the maximum number of caregivers funded for health care based on the most recent MOU with the IHSS providers’ union. Additionally, in this reporting period, a minimum wage increase of \$0.50 went into effect January 1, 2024, increasing wages to \$18.39 and then again by \$0.35 on July 1, 2024 due to a negotiated wage supplemental increase, bringing the hourly wage to \$18.74 (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 943 in December 2023 to 928 June 2024, a decrease of 15 cases from the last report period. The average caseload year-to-year decreased -6.29%, while expenditures increased 2.62%. Since implementing Pre-Custodial Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings in November 2020, the Department has seen fewer children coming into care because 60% of the alternative arrangements are made with families during the CFT meeting. These CFT meetings with the pre-custodial families encourage parents to bring other family members to the meeting who are willing to support and assist the parents in creating a safer environment which has resulted in a preventative decrease in children coming into foster care. However, the children that are coming into care have more acute needs as well as more placement insecurities. Some of these placements include a higher level of care via a Short Term Residential Therapeutic, San Andreas Regional Center placements, Small Family Homes, or Foster Family Agencies. Some acute needs have necessitated that the Department augment the pay rates or even pay for two beds to place one child. Physical aggression such as assault of other minors and adults, running away, destroying property, and ongoing hospitalizations are some of the trauma responses that have also resulted in higher placement costs. Overall, the Department has been finalizing less adoptions since 2020, which means less Adoption & Assistance Program (AAP) cases which stay open until the child turns 18 years old. 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:

As we continue to move out of the recovery stage of the Pandemic, caseload trends and expenditures for these entitlement programs are on the rise and expenditures will be closely monitored to ensure that the Programs continue to stay within the upcoming FY 2024-25 Adopted Budget. There are sufficient appropriations and County General Fund contributions in the FY 2023-24 Adopted Budget.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

Mark a check to the related Board of Supervisors Strategic Initiatives

- Economic Development
- Administration
- Health & Human Services
- Infrastructure
- Public Safety

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Attachments: January - June 2024 Caseload and Expenditure Report