



County of Monterey

Item No.

Board Report

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

Legistar File Number: BC 24-021

February 28, 2024

Introduced: 2/15/2024

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 July through December 2023.

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 July through December 2023.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

The attached report represents actual caseload and expenditure data through December 2023. The report compares data month-to-month and year-to-year for three years for the following programs:

- **General Assistance (GA)** caseload increased from 299 in June 2023 to 349 in December 2023, an additional 50 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average increase of 20.3%. 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.

The GA program continues to have a 6-month time limit for eligible participants to be on the program for those who are eligible for work (12%) and the 88% of the caseload is on temporary or permanent disability. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) offsets the General Assistance expenditures reflected in the expenditure chart, which are approximately 55% lower than the last report period, resulting in higher expenditures reported. The cost of assistance reflects an increase of 20.7% from a year-to-year perspective which correlates to the percentage caseload increase of 20.3%. (See attached chart, Page 1).

- **CalWORKs** caseload increased from 3,359 in June 2023 to 3,564 in December 2023, an increase of 205 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an average increase of 5.8%. As with the GA caseload discussed above, CalWORKS cases were also affected due to decreased in-person contact during the pandemic. We do expect the caseload to continue rising because the pandemic benefits such as the economic stimulus and enhanced unemployment benefits made many customers ineligible for benefits due to income level. Since those benefits have concluded, more people have returned for assistance and are now eligible, increasing the caseloads as predicted. This reporting period reflects a higher monthly caseload than the previous year.

CalWORKs costs, on average, from year-to-year, increased 4.4%. This reporting period, the average monthly costs are higher in comparison to the same point in time last fiscal year. This is a direct result of the increase in caseload and the increase of the maximum aid grant payment by 3.6% as of October 1, 2023 (See Attached chart, page 2).

- **CalFresh** caseload continues to increase from 21,628 in June 2023 to 22,068 in December 2023, an increase of 440 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, there is a slight increase in average monthly caseload of 3%. Community Benefits experiences an upward trend of applications and caseload increases due to “Winter Workload” which is a result of the agriculture workforce being laid off till the Spring. Community Benefits received 14,660 applications during this reporting period. CalFresh Applications are approved 100% within 30 days, and staff are at 94.3% for issuing expedited benefits within three days (see Attached chart, page 3).
- **Medi-Cal** caseload decreased from 92,263 in June 2023 to 85,635 in December 2023, a decrease of 6,628 cases. From a year-to-year perspective, this represents a slight monthly average decrease of 1.1%. This slight decrease is a direct result of the Department’s process of conducting customer’s benefit redeterminations. During the pandemic, the State put a hold on counties to redetermine benefit eligibility; however, the State lifted that hold on April 1, 2023. This continues to be a huge workload impact for our Community Benefit staff while also doing regular ongoing workload. Staff received 8,810 applications in this report period (See Attached chart, page 3).
- Community Benefits has three customer service 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 are already higher in the first six months of FY 2023-24 in comparison to all 12 months of FY 2022-23. Community Benefits continues to strategize how to streamline their “Frontline” process to assist their customers, thereby being more efficient and reducing customer wait time. One new strategy will happen in March 2024 as a new Self-Service Center is implemented which will teach customers on the online services for Benefits Cal and how to upload necessary documents for DSS. Community Benefits serves 256,090 individuals in Monterey County, which is 59% of Monterey County’s population.

- In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)** paid hours slightly decreased from 651,155 in June 2023 to 650,189 in December 2023, a decrease of 966 hours. From a year-to-year perspective, there is an increase of 6.3% in average monthly hours; however, overall the hours appear to be slowing down and remaining steady over the last 6 months. 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, undocumented community members became qualified for Medi-Cal which allowed them to access IHSS benefits. The IHSS wages and benefits (expenditures) for FY 2023-24 have increased 10.14% from FY 2022-23 due to the increase in hours worked in this reporting period along with Board-approved increases for wages and health benefits. There is no caregiver waitlist for health benefits. In this reporting period, a negotiated wage increase of \$0.50 went into effect July 1, 2023, increasing hourly wage to \$17.89. The next wage increase of \$0.50 cents will go into effect on January 1, 2024, due to a State Minimum Wage increase, bringing the hourly wage to \$18.39 (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 989 in July 2023 to 943 December 2023, a decrease of 46 cases from the last report period. The average caseload year-to-year decreased 5.61%, and expenditures decreased 0.3%. 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 pre-custodial cases are resolved by making alternative arrangements 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. The children that are coming into care have more acute needs as well as more placement insecurities. In addition, the Department has been finalizing fewer adoptions since 2020, which means fewer Adoption & Assistance Program (AAP) cases that stay open until the child turns 18 years old. The attached chart, page 5, reflects the reasons that children exit foster care placements.

Expenditures reflect a slight decrease but are really very close to the same six months as last fiscal year. Out of Home Care costs are offset by Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and with the lower caseload, still has the expenditures almost the same as this time last year, only reflecting a slight decrease of 0.3% monthly average. This is due to the cost per child in placement varies greatly and depends upon the level of care required and additional services needed to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

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, most of these 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 FY 2023-24 Adopted Budget. There are sufficient appropriations and County General Fund contributions in the FY 2023-24 Adopted Budget.

Legistar File Number: BC 24-021

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

Prepared by: Becky Cromer, Finance Manager III, x4404

DocuSigned by:

DF027950448749D...

Approved by: Lori A. Medina, Dept. of Social Services Director, x4430

Attachments: July - December 2023 Caseload and Expenditure Report