

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

DATE: October 24, 2014

TO: Supervisor Peggy Romo West, Chairwoman, Health and Human Needs Committee

FROM: Héctor Colón, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Prepared by Geri L. Lyday, Administrator Disabilities Services Division

SUBJECT: **An informational report from the Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), regarding the General Assistance Burials Program and the Interim Disability Assistance Program (IDAP) in the Disabilities Services Division**

Issue

The 2015 County Executive's Recommended Budget includes the elimination of the General Assistance (GA) Burials Program as well as an initiative to restructure the IDAP program to achieve better efficiencies and integrate the program to be more responsive to consumers requesting service. At the request of the Chairwoman of the Health and Human Needs Committee, the following information is being provided regarding the two budget initiatives.

Background

Burial Assistance Program

The GA Burials Program was formerly part of the Economic Support Division within the Department of Health and Human Services and was closely associated with the State-funded Medicaid Burials program as a benefit offered through that Division. It is estimated that this program has been in operation for over 30 years. The program was transferred to DSD in January 2012 when the State assumed responsibility for the Economic Support Division. Since that time, DSD has worked to reduce the costs of this program through rate adjustments and thorough eligibility determination efforts which ensure that all those who may have eligibility for Medicaid Burials are referred to the State.

The 2014 Budget includes \$310,000 for burial assistance payments with \$211,695 projected to be spent. In addition, it is anticipated that 234 burial cases will be processed. The program is currently operated using a .40 FTE Bilingual Human Service Worker at an annual cost of \$30,902 and a .10 FTE Fiscal Assistant 2 at an annual cost of \$6,265.

As a result of fiscal constraints for 2015, divisions were asked to review their mandated core services versus non-mandated services. DSD concentrated on maintaining those programs that are consistent with the mission of DHHS and provide primary services to those adults and children with disabilities who are among the most vulnerable in our community. In addition, this program is not a mandated service under Wisconsin Statutes for DSD. DSD, therefore,

made the decision to recommend elimination of the GA Burials Program and had a discussion with the Medical Examiner's Office about assuming responsibility for the program beginning in 2015. The Medical Examiner's Office has a statutory obligation under Chapter 979.09 of Wisconsin Statutes to cover expenses of burial or cremation of unclaimed bodies. It should be noted that the program has provided primarily supplemental funding for families and does not cover the entire cost of burial services.

Interim Disability Assistance Program (IDAP)

The IDAP program is another function formerly performed by the Economic Support Division. It is estimated that IDAP has been operating for greater than 20 years though the exact length of time is unknown. This program provides short-term financial assistance to individuals who apply for Social Security benefits and are awaiting an award of benefits from the Social Security Administration.

Once Individuals are referred to the program, they are evaluated to determine financial and medical eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). County staff determines financial eligibility while medical eligibility is performed through an annual contract for \$45,000 with Community Advocates. If a person is determined to be both financially and medically eligible, that person receives a monthly IDAP payment of \$205.

Once the individual is awarded SSI benefits, the Social Security Administration reimburses the County based on the individual's eligibility date. It should be noted that the County's reimbursement does not always cover the entire cost of the total payments made to individuals. The amount is limited by the individual's eligibility date.

In 2014, the average number of people receiving IDAP payments each month has been 79. Further, it is anticipated that total payments will be \$212,175 while the anticipated revenue from Social Security is projected to be \$87,143 resulting in a tax levy need of \$125,033. This is \$54,167 above the \$71,000 in tax levy budgeted for 2014.

Over the years, the program has experienced decreased revenues resulting from reductions in back payments to individuals. It is believed that this has occurred, in part, due to the increasing unavailability of healthcare providers to complete the required documentation to verify disability.

In addition, the program is staffed by a .60 FTE Bilingual Human Service Worker (who also supports the GA Burials Program) at an annual cost of \$46,352.

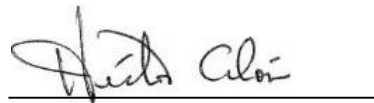
IDAP is included in the 2015 Recommended Budget. However, DSD is recommending that a community agency assume full program oversight/management of IDAP and that the associated tax levy be transferred to this non-profit agency. Since Community Advocates currently manages part of the IDAP program and DSD manages the remainder, the Division is currently pursuing negotiations with this agency to assume full oversight. This change should provide for more coordination and efficiency in the overall operation of this program.

While this initiative is considered a budget neutral change, it was anticipated that some efficiencies would be realized by streamlining the application and approval process to help consumers obtain benefits more rapidly. In addition, the program is projecting a higher percentage of successful outcomes for those applying for benefits through the utilization of legal assistance available from Community Advocates.

In addition, both the transition of IDAP to a community agency and elimination of the GA Burials Program will allow for the redeployment of a bilingual position. Bilingual services in the Disability Resource Center are critically needed.

Recommendation

This is an informational report. No action is necessary.



Héctor Colón, Director
Department of Health and Human Services

cc: County Executive Chris Abele
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