

Eliminating General Assistance (GA) is expensive and morally wrong

The GA program supports the most vulnerable Pennsylvanians who have no other income. It is truly a program of last resort. The only people who can receive GA are:

- Disabled or sick adults without children,
- Domestic violence survivors, many of whom have just fled their abusers,
- Adults caring for someone who is sick or disabled, or for an unrelated child,
- Adults participating in alcohol and other drug treatment programs, and
- Children living with an unrelated adult.

The GA program provides only a subsistence benefit level. GA pays only \$205 per month in most counties (Five counties have higher amounts, 28 counties have lower amounts.) This amount is less than 25% of the federal poverty line and has not been increased since 1990.

The GA program is not being misused. Since the current recession started in December 2007, the Pennsylvania economy has lost over 100,000 jobs (net). Meanwhile, the number of people receiving GA has increased by only 10,352 (from 57,357 to 67,879). Fewer than 1 in 200 Pennsylvanians receive GA, but for those that do, it is a critical safety net benefit that can be the difference between life and death.

Eliminating GA is penny wise and pound foolish. DPW estimates that eliminating the GA program will save \$150 million per year. It also proposes an additional \$159 million in cuts to state funded medical assistance to people in the former GA categories. But these projected savings will be far exceeded by the additional public costs to support the newly homeless and destitute. By cutting GA, more very poor individuals will turn to churches, homeless shelters, community assistance agencies, and other agencies as they struggle to survive. These agencies are already under enormous pressure because of the recession.

The end of GA will worsen severe hardship. Without a GA safety net, battered women will have to remain with abusive partners. Disabled adults will lose their housing. And already struggling Pennsylvanians will become even more desperate.

For many people, GA is simply a loan program. Many people receive GA while they wait for the Social Security Administration to consider their disability claim. When they are approved for disability, the Department of Public Welfare is reimbursed for their GA from their disability payments.

GA is already temporary--by law--for many individuals. Women receiving domestic violence services, and individuals in alcohol and other drug treatment programs that preclude work, are only eligible for nine months in a lifetime. Others only receive GA while they await a favorable decision on their application for disability benefits from the Social Security administration.

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