

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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MORE HOUSING HELP URGED FOR CALWORKS FAMILIES

Alameda County Social Services Agency and CalWORKs recipients join call to augment budget for program that aids families and children.

Oakland, CA (May 14, 2015) – The Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA) and CalWORKs recipients are joining a statewide call to augment the budget for the CalWORKs Housing Support Program (HSP), which helps homeless CalWORKs families find stable housing. Counties across the state are requesting an additional \$30 million allocation in the 2015-2016 state budget to serve an additional estimated 10,350 children in 4,500 families.

Background

While the CalWORKs program has traditionally focused on support such as employment training and child care, soaring housing costs have increased the need for housing help for recipients of public assistance to address housing insecurity. The state allocated \$20 million to 20 counties for HSP in September 2014, which must be used before June 30, 2015.

Counties were given the flexibility to design their own HSP plan to serve the needs of their community, and are reporting encouraging results. HSP is credited with serving an estimated 6,900 children in 3,000 families.

SSA strongly supports the \$30 million requested increase based on the significant impact the current allocation has made in the lives of the families served by the program. In an attempt to holistically meet the needs of recipients of public assistance, SSA recognizes that we must address housing insecurity and lack of affordable Bay Area housing for people who have been left out of the housing conversation. CalWORKs clients cannot begin to deal with other challenges in their lives, such as finding a job to provide food and basic necessities for their children, when they don't have a permanent roof over their heads. Children's health and school work also suffer.

The need is especially great for CalWORKs families in Alameda County, noted Lori A. Cox, SSA's director. "The CalWORKs population is mainly unemployed," she said, adding, "Here in the East Bay, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment is close to \$2,000 a month and expected to increase. It's difficult enough for low-to-moderate wage earners, but for this population it's nearly impossible to find stable housing without federal or state intervention."

Impact in Alameda County

Alameda County has received \$1.266 million in HSP funds. SSA worked with community based organizations including ABODE Services, East Oakland Community Project, Berkeley Food and Housing Project, and Building Futures with Women & Children to utilize the funds on behalf of CalWORKs families.

SSA has referred over 200 families to the program, which has enrolled 125 families and has so far been able to move 19 families – 42 individuals – out of homelessness and into stable housing. An additional 10 families are being temporarily housed in motels until more permanent housing can be found. SSA's intent is to assist each of the families who are still waiting for services.

HSP Brings Stability to a Grandmother and her Five-Year-Old Grandson

Barbara, a 49 year old CalWORKs client caring for her five year old grandson, was renting a house for 13 years until the owner wanted to sell the house and asked her to move. Even though she had a Section 8 housing subsidy, she could not find a landlord willing to take her voucher so quickly. The owner was threatening an eviction, so she had to leave without a permanent place for herself and her grandson.

She put her possessions in storage and was unable to keep up with the payments of \$331 per month. She had to leave almost everything behind and took only a few boxes of clothes. She and her grandson began moving from place to place until she found a room for rent, which lasted for eight months until the owner wanted to renovate the house. Again, she and her grandson were asked to leave the property, rendering them homeless a second time.

Barbara immediately started looking for housing. She found housing, but needed financial assistance. The HSP was there to assist her in securing permanent housing and resolving the homeless crisis for herself and her grandson.

Raising Awareness

SSA staff and clients are confident that the budget augmentation will become reality through public awareness, especially through personal stories and profiles of CalWORKs clients who have benefited from the program. Barbara is willing to speak with the press about her experience with HSP. To arrange to speak with her, or to contact experts on the HSP's legislative and budget issues, please call:

- Lori A. Cox, Director, Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA)
Phone: (510) 271-9100; or
- Andrea Ford, Assistant Agency Director, SSA Workforce and Benefits Administration
Phone: (510) 259-3807.

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