

**COMMITTEE REPORT**  
**HOUSE**

(7)

FURTHER:

4/8/85

Date: 4-19-85

The Committee on FINANCE has had HB 231

"An Act relating to amount of general and temporary relief assistance."

under consideration and recommends:

- do pass  do not pass
- do pass with attached amendments(s)
- replace with CS for \_\_\_\_\_  same title
- new title
- and recommends \_\_\_\_\_
- AND attaches a "Letter of Intent"  New Fiscal Note <sup>4/21/85</sup> 399.2
- reports it back without recommendation  Zero Fiscal Note Attached
- referred to the \_\_\_\_\_ Committee

**MEMBERS SIGNING**  
**DO PASS**

[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
        
        
        
        
      

**MEMBERS HAVING**  
**OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:**

[Signature]  
[Signature] NO REC.  
[Signature] NO REC.  
[Signature] NO REC.  
[Signature] NO REC.  
        
      

[Signature]  
**CHAIRMAN**

Introduced: 2/25/85  
Referred: Health, Education &  
Social Services and Finance

1 IN THE HOUSE

BY CLOCKSIN AND GRUENBERG

2

HOUSE BILL NO. 231

3

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

4

FOURTEENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

5

A BILL

6 For an Act entitled: "An Act relating to amount of general and temporary  
7 relief assistance."

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

9 \* Section 1. AS 47.25.130 is amended to read:

10 Sec. 47.25.130. AMOUNT OF ASSISTANCE. The amount of assistance  
11 for a needy person shall be determined by the department with regard  
12 to the resources and needs of the person and the conditions existing  
13 in each case. Where possible, assistance shall be sufficient to  
14 provide the applicant with reasonable subsistence according to stan-  
15 dards of assistance established by the department. However, the  
16 amount of assistance for subsistence needs may not exceed \$200 [\$80] a  
17 person a calendar month.

18 \* Sec. 2. AS 47.25.250 is amended to read:

19 Sec. 47.25.250. TEMPORARY RELIEF. When a needy person is not  
20 entitled to assistance under AS 47.25.120 - 47.25.300 and has no  
21 relatives in the state liable for support under AS 47.25.230 and  
22 47.25.240, the needy person may receive temporary assistance in the  
23 form and amount which the department considers necessary. Temporary  
24 assistance for needs other than transportation and medical care may  
25 not exceed \$200 [\$80] per person per month.

STATE OF ALASKA 1985 LEGISLATIVE SESSION  
FISCAL NOTE

Revision Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**REQUEST**

Bill/Resolution No.: HB 231  
 Title: An Act Relating to Amount of General and Temp. Relief Assistance.  
 Sponsor: Reps. Clocksin & Gruenberg  
 Requestor: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Request: \_\_\_\_\_

**FISCAL DETAIL**

Agency Affected: DHSS/Div. of Public Assistance  
 Program Category Affected: Social and Economic Assistance Programs for General Population BRU, Program or Subprogram(s) Affected: Assistance Payments BRU - General Relief Assistance.

**EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)**

	FY 85	FY 86	FY 87	FY 88	FY 89	FY 90
<b>OPERATING</b>						
100 PERSONAL SERVICES			34.3	35.7	37.1	38.6
200 TRAVEL						
300 CONTRACTUAL						
400 SUPPLIES						
500 EQUIPMENT			2.0			
600 LAND & STRUCTURES						
700 GRANTS, CLAIMS	0	399.2	439.1	461.1	479.5	498.7
800 MISCELLANEOUS						
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>		<b>399.2</b>	<b>475.4</b>	<b>496.8</b>	<b>516.6</b>	<b>537.3</b>

<b>CAPITAL</b>						
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<b>REVENUE</b>						
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**FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)**

GENERAL FUND	0	399.2	475.4	496.8	516.6	537.3
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>399.2</b>	<b>475.4</b>	<b>496.8</b>	<b>516.6</b>	<b>537.3</b>

**POSITIONS:**

FULL-TIME			1	1	1	1
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

**ANALYSIS:** Attach a separate page if necessary

See Attached Analysis

Prepared By: John R. Taber, Director  
 Division: Public Assistance

Phone: 465-3347  
 Date: March 6, 1985

Approved by Commissioner: John R. Poy  
 Agency: Health & Social Services

Date: 4-2-85 *JCC*

Distribution (by Agency preparing fiscal note):  
 Legislative Finance  
 Legislative Sponsor  
 Requestor

FISCAL NOTE ANALYSIS - HB 231

GRA Caseload Characteristics (Burial Assistance Not Included)

<u>Service Category</u>	<u>Percent of GRA Expenditures</u>
Rental Assistance	87.6 %
Utility Assistance	4.7 %
Miscellaneous Assistance (18 yr. olds in High School, Food, and Clothing)	7.7 %

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>Percentage of GRA Caseload</u>
1	55.0
2	18.5
3	11.6
4	7.3
5	5.5
6 or more	2.1

FY 1986 GRA caseload was derived by increasing projected current year caseload (excluding burial assistance) by 8.8 percent. This projected caseload increase is based on the anticipated response to an increased benefit level. Benefits will not always equal the \$200 per person limit. Vendor payments are made for specific needs of eligible households, and will often be less than the allowable limit. (See projected payment amount by household size below).

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>Annual Cases/Payment Amount</u>	<u>Total</u>
1	1100 X 195	\$214,500
2	370 X 385	142,450
3	232 X 560	129,920
4	146 X 680	99,280
5	110 X 750	82,500
6	42 X 775	32,550
	<u>1998</u>	<u>\$701,200</u>

FY 1986 Need With New Payment Standard	701.2
Less FY 86 Governor's Request (Rental and Misc. Assistance Only)	302.0
FY 86 Increment Increase to Fund New Standard	<u>399.2</u>

FY 1987 caseload was derived by increasing FY 1986 by 10 percent. This projected caseload growth is due to increased benefit amounts attracting more clientele, and the spreading knowledge of higher payments through agency outreach efforts. The caseload should expand considerably during the first two years as the new benefit level becomes known. At this point, one Eligibility Technician (R/S 12B Anchorage) would be needed to accommodate the larger caseload. One-time funding of 2.0 is budgeted for purchase of office equipment for 1.0 PFT new position.

FY 1988 expenditures are calculated at a 5 percent rate of growth. FY 1989-1990 are calculated at a 4 percent rate of growth.

POSITION PAPER  
HOUSE BILL NO. 231

For "An Act relating to amount of general and temporary assistance."

Legislation is proposed to increase the maximum monthly benefit amount paid to eligible applicants under the Division of Public Assistance, General Relief Assistance program (GRA) from \$80 to \$200 per person. Alaska's GRA program dates back to when federal assistance programs were not as extensive as they are today. As the major assistance programs expanded in scope, GRA became more limited in terms of its eligibility requirements and the amount of financial aid available. The GRA program remains an important part of Alaska's welfare system, providing for the specific emergency needs of clients unable to meet those needs through other programs. Those basic needs include shelter, utilities, transportation, food, and clothing. In addition, limited funds for dignified burial of a needy person may be provided. Benefits are paid directly to the vendor providing for the eligible client's specific need. The program is 100 percent state funded, and is used only after the applicant has exhausted all other possible resources.

The Division of Public Assistance is currently serving 1800 cases annually with a budget of \$537,000. A large percentage of these cases involve rental assistance payments. There are numerous local agencies providing support and shelter services for the needy. This public and private service agency network, along with the GRA program, does help provide for the basic needs of the indigent.

Enactment of HB 231 would have significant impact on the General Relief Assistance Program. The major effect would be the increase in the GRA caseload due to the attractiveness of the increased payment standard. It is estimated that the GRA caseload would increase by at least 20 percent in two years as a result of this Act. This caseload increase will result in the need for additional staff to meet the service demand. Clients must apply for assistance each month they experience a specific emergency need. GRA cases are therefore, very labor intensive compared to other assistance programs where client cases are merely maintained once opened. The division would have to dedicate more staff time to the intake and processing of these GRA applications. The fiscal note for this Act calls for the addition of one Eligibility Technician position in FY 1987. However, the true administrative impact of increased caseload would not be alleviated in the other large district offices, which would not receive any new positions. A significant caseload increase in a given area could have an adverse effect on the efficiency and eligibility decision time frames in the offices.

House Bill 231 does offer some improvement to the current GRA program. The \$80 per person monthly maximum payment now in effect is widely considered to be too low. The fact that a majority of GRA payments are for the allowable maximum indicates that clients'

specific needs often exceed the available benefit. This does not necessarily mean a higher payment amount is needed, since there are other resources available to the needy (i.e. food stamps, energy assistance, homeless shelters, charitable organizations, etc.). GRA is, however, one of the few programs offering cash rental assistance to those facing eviction. This has become the largest service component of the program, and will doubtless expand with implementation of a higher payment amount. A higher payment amount would draw more households to use GRA, and to use it repeatedly, because it would pay most or all of the overdue rent. This trend could represent a drift toward an income maintenance program, and away from the established philosophy of GRA as a program of last resort.

While increased payments for the existing program represents a beneficial change in the service delivered by the division and received by its GRA clientele, it is not viewed at this time as a priority use of additional state dollars. While this Act is consistent with the department's goals and objectives to provide all Alaskans with a reasonable level of subsistence, the department does not feel there is a serious unmet need requiring urgent change.

There is not an obvious alternative to this Act which better meets the needs of the indigent. The concerted efforts of public and private agencies currently form a basic emergency service network for our most needy citizens. Increasing the State's GRA benefit amount would help strengthen this network, yet the responsibility to do so does not rest entirely upon the State. It is a good idea and a just cause, but its affordability in light of other pressing needs is the question. The language of the Act does give the Department discretion in setting the monthly benefit amount lower than \$200. This could be a cost saving option which could help meet the need at a lesser cost, but public demand and advocacy groups would push vigorously to get and keep the benefit level at the maximum of \$200.

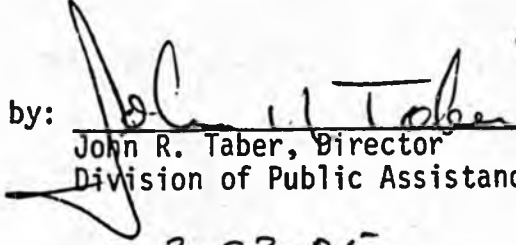
#### DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

House Bill 231 proposes an increase in the maximum monthly benefit amount available under the General Relief Assistance Program from \$80 to \$200 per person. The need for the increased benefit amount is a legitimate concern. It is consistent with the department's objectives and the program goals.

**POSITION PAPER/Department of Health & Social Services**

The Department of Health and Social Services supports this bill in concept only. Implementation of the bill would require the addition of funding to the Governor's budget request, and the Department does not urge funding of this increase at the expense of other worthwhile programs already in existence.

Recommended by:

  
John R. Taber, Director  
Division of Public Assistance

Date:

3-28-85

Approved by:

  
John R. Pugh, Commissioner  
Department of Health &  
Social Services

Date:

4-2-85



ALASKA CHAPTER  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS, INC.

Box 10430  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99710

ISSUE: GENERAL RELIEF PAYMENTS

The maximum payment for a destitute person under Alaska's General Relief Statutes is only \$80 per month! THAT AMOUNT HAS REMAINED UNCHANGED SINCE 1957!!! Further, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services regulations provide that payments must go to a vendor on-behalf of the person and not to the person themselves. Such regulations also provide that General Relief payments cannot be paid on a regular basis, but rather are mostly restricted to a one-time payment. The result of such law and regulation is that people who are extremely poor receive virtually no assistance from a State which is so wealthy it can afford to subsidize home mortgages.

ACTION REQUESTED

The Alaska Chapter, National Association of Social Workers recommends legislation amending A.S.47.25 to double the General Relief maximum payment from \$80 to \$160 per month with corresponding increase in appropriation to the Division of Public Assistance to enable them to make such payments.

In addition, it is recommended that the Legislative Regulation Review Committee review the General Relief regulations to determine how they could better serve people who are poor.

Further it is recommended that the Department of Health & Social Services be directed by the Legislature to conduct a study of the distribution and adequacy of payments and make a report to the Legislature by January, 1986.

SOME FACTS ABOUT ALASKA'S GENERAL RELIEF  
PROGRAM

General Relief Appropriations

FY '82	\$530,000
FY '83	\$451,000
FY '84	\$650,000
FY '85	\$537,000

General Relief Utilization \*

Average of 351 clients per month

Shelter & Utilities

Average of 21 burials per month

Funeral costs

Average payment

\$80 per client      Shelter & Utilities

\$806 per client      Burial

Per-cent of Appropriation for Different Services

Utilization for burial      48%

Utilization for shelter & utilities      52%

If GR appropriation were doubled, at least double the number of persons now served could be expected to apply, and more landlords would accept GR payment since it would be nearer to the actual amount of rent owed them.

\*State-wide figures, but the majority is utilized in Anchorage.  
Burial numbers have increased since BIA no longer provides burial payments

\*Figures provided by the Anchorage Office of the Division of Public Assistance  
November, 1984

GENERAL RELIEF (GR)

Program Purpose

Alaska's General Relief Program provides assistance for obtaining the necessities of life for people who temporarily have absolutely no other personal, private, or public resources available to meet their needs.

Eligibility Criteria:

Recipients of GR must meet the following criteria:

1. They must be in financial need;\*
2. They must have inadequate resources to meet their basic needs;
3. They must be 18 years old or be eligible minors;
4. They must have proof of a specific unmet need for a subsistence item such as an eviction notice for overdue rent, or a utility shut-off notice;
5. They must be physically present in Alaska at the time of application;
6. They must register for work unless otherwise exempted.

\*NEED STANDARDS (Monthly allowances) Note: Financial eligibility for GR-GRM exists only if need exceeds net income (need standard minus net income equals unmet need, which equals vendor or direct cash payment).

Need Standards

Adult-only households:

<u>Number of Adults</u>	<u>Maximum Need Standard</u>
1	\$300
2	400
3	500
4	600
5	700

\$100 shall be added for each additional adult.

Households with children and adults:

<u>Number of Persons</u>	<u>Maximum Need Standard</u>
Adult plus 1 child	\$300
Adult plus 2 children	350
Adult plus 3 children	400
Adult plus 4 children	450
Adult plus 5 children	500
Adult plus 6 children	550
Adult plus 7 children	600

\$100 shall be added for each additional adult and \$50 for each additional child.

If income is larger than the need standard, even by \$1, the applicant is not eligible. Need standards above were in effect June, 1983.

Exception: In open APA and AFDC cases with no prior resource to provide drugs needed for medical treatment, GRM eligibility will exist.

Coverage: GR can pay up to \$80 per month, per eligible person, to vendors on behalf of needy clients, and can provide cash payments of up to \$80 per month per person for certain needy high school students and older persons who have no other resources and who have applied for regular cash assistance from other programs.

Normally, GR provides assistance for such needs as rent, heating fuel, or electrical bills in amounts not to exceed the maximum of \$80 per eligible person.

Also, under certain very limited circumstances, indigents who are recent arrivals in Alaska can be provided one-way tickets to their last place of residence.

Certain burial costs can be paid through GR for burial of indigent deceased persons who were eligible by virtue of having no resources available to meet their needs. Relatives who are unable to provide for the costs of the burial may apply for assistance.

GR applications are available at all Division of Public Assistance offices. Office addresses are listed on page 3 of this booklet.

Applications are also available from fee agents in most smaller towns.

# STATE OF ALASKA

## DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

DIVISION OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

BILL SHEFFIELD, GOVERNOR

Document # 8390

POUCH H-07  
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811

PHONE: 465-3355

March 1, 1983

The Honorable Vic Fischer  
Senator  
Room 423, Capitol Building  
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Senator Fischer:

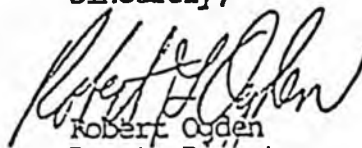
In a hearing on February 28, you inquired about the relationship of the 53 \$80 General Relief maximum payment level set in 1953 to current values, needs, or costs. We have looked at several ways of translating values, including comparisons (insofar as they exist) with other assistance program payments.

We have concluded that the only valid approach is to assume that the 1953 \$80 maximum was adequate in 1953, and to translate these 1953 Alaska dollars into 1983 Alaska dollars.

Mr. Chris Miller, Department of Labor, Division of Research and statistics, was kind enough to do this computation for us, using CPI history. The US CPI went from 1953 80.1 to 1982 289.1. Using this measure \$80 in 1953 would require an equivalent of \$288.72 in 1982 dollars. The Anchorage CPI was first set in 1960, increasing from 91.4 to 241.9 between 1960 and 1982. Using this measure, \$80 in 1960 would require an equivalent of \$211.76 in 1982. (For a assistance comparison, we paid between \$125 and \$175 for a 2-person AFDC household in 1970, we pay \$546 now.)

As we have noted in past studies on AFDC payment levels, "adequacy" of assistance payment levels is not capable of being demonstrated by objective data. Nationally, most maximums tend to be set by applying political and fiscal considerations to a past level of payment. This payment "base" is often assumed to be adequate simply because no one can conclusively prove that it was inadequate.

Sincerely,



Robert Ogden  
Deputy Director

cc: Chris Miller, DOL, DR & S

# 'Inadequate' relief forces needy into crisis shelters

by Tim Leslie  
Times Writer

The state's failure to provide adequate housing assistance to the needy is forcing destitute Alaskans to move out of apartments into crowded emergency shelters, a recently completed study says.

Released jointly by the Alaska Public Interest Research Group and the Alaska Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the study is an evaluation of the state's General Relief Assistance Program.

The study claims needy families are being forced to move into emergency shelters because the program's monthly \$80-per-person payments are "inadequate." As a result, the study concludes, the state is "encouraging the emergence of a permanent underclass of chronically homeless people."

The General Relief Program, administered by the state Department of Health and Social Services, was established in 1953 to provide "subsistence for needy persons when no other source of assistance is available to them." No monetary limits are placed on medical grants, but those seeking money for food, clothing, or rent are entitled to a maximum of \$80 per month.

The study criticizes the program because the \$80-per-person cap has never been increased, despite Alaska's rising housing costs.

"It is easy to imagine how rent increases averaging 70 to 80 percent over a five-year period would erode the effectiveness of an \$80-per-month grant," the study says.

The study also criticizes the program's "antiquated" eligibility criteria for keeping money out of the hands of the needy. The study says unspent appropriations led legislators to reduce the program's budget from \$900,000 in 1983 to \$537,000 for 1985, but adds that much of the money remained unspent because needy people earning more than \$300 per month cannot qualify for assistance.

"The apparent surplus (in the program's budget) is not really a surplus at all, but a reflection of legitimate need which is obscured by serious defects in the structure of the program," the study says.

AkPIRG President Maureen Kennedy said she thinks state

## Safety net fails to catch woman

by Tim Leslie  
Times Writer

Although problems with the state's General Relief Assistance Program have been detailed in a recently completed study, Eunice Fennel said she learned of the program's shortcomings first hand — as a public assistance recipient.

Fennel, 47, said she never expected to be asking the state to help pay the rent. But the seven-year Anchorage resident said she didn't expect her health would deteriorate so quickly, either.

"You don't ever know when your health's going to go out on you," said Fennel, who lives in a small, one-bedroom apartment in Spenard. "I've always been so independent."

Fennel was hospitalized in June and July for degenerative arthritis in her hips and spine. Suddenly forced to take time off from her job as a clerk-typist, she borrowed money from friends to help pay her \$405 monthly rent.

Fennel went back to work part time in September and — with bills starting to pile up — finally convinced a doctor to approve her return to full-time work in October. But recurring pain in her left hip soon forced her back into the hospital.

It was then that Fennel decided it was time to swallow her pride and investigate the possibility of obtaining public assistance.

"I've worked all my life," Fennel said. "It's been embarrassing to have to ask for help."

Fennel received \$80-a-month allowances from the General Relief Program in November, December and January. But when she returned to work part time in mid-January, Fennel was warned that individuals who earn more than \$300 per month are ineligible for the program. Fennel, who will earn \$370 this month, said she may also lose her food stamps.

Friends have recommended she apply for federal disability aid, but Fennel said she would receive only \$440 per month and would be required to quit her job. That, she said, would force her from her apartment and into an emergency shelter.

Although she walks with crutches and is taking medication for chronic pain, Fennel said she will again ask her doctor for permission to work a full 40-hour week.

"I'm going to try to work full time," Fennel said. "I don't have a choice."

legislators are aware of the program's problems, but are choosing to ignore them.

"Though rents in Anchorage have doubled since 1978, the legislature has cut the (General Relief Program) appropriation by 40 percent over the last two years," Kennedy said. "The legislature realizes the program is unworkable and inadequate, but rather than overhaul it and increase payments to make a difference, they've cut back."

"We give state employees in one day's per diem more than we give general relief recipients in a month," added NASW President Yvonne Chase.

The study says emergency shelters are "extremely valuable," but should not be viewed as

the solution to the problem of housing the poor. To do so, the study says, "has the effect of institutionalizing homelessness rather than counteracting it, encouraging the emergence of a permanent underclass of chronically homeless people."

A copy of the study has been sent to Rep. Don Clocksin, D-Anchorage, who plans to draft a bill this year which would overhaul the General Relief Program.

Clocksin said he will work to revise the program's outdated eligibility criteria and will try to double the grants from \$80 to \$160 per month.

February 16, 1985

THE Anchorage  
Times

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From: CASH, FOOD and MEDICAL ASSISTANCE, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance, 1983

Introduced: 2/25/85  
Referred: Health, Education &  
Social Services and Finance

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