



From Your Associate Director

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Receiving Townships' State Reimbursement Funds are Cut

TOWNSHIP GENERAL ASSISTANCE programs experienced a shortfall in their ability to become a receiving township with the state of Illinois. It is important to provide this information to all township supervisors and general assistance administrators/staff.

This elimination of funding is the result of the state budget's approval. When the 2012 state budget was approved, this line item was eliminated from the Department of Human Services (DHS) budget. This was not an action where TOI was notified or could have lobbied to secure as it was part of the final 11th hour budget negotiations between the Governor's office and the Illinois General Assembly.

In addition to the elimination of funding, DHS has taken steps to remove all program materials from the department website and other reference libraries. DHS no longer accepts calls for assistance effective August 1, 2011. This is one more service similar to the local government unit of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity being eliminated. However, the cause and need are still present. Townships must understand the implications of this elimination, and learn to do what they are so familiar with in the role of providing more with less as the government closest to the people.

I thought that I could provide some background for officials to see where the budget cuts originated and what the options are for township supervisors, as the delivery of general assistance is in fact a statutory responsibility of that elected position.

First, all townships were, at one point, eligible to become receiving townships. Recent research indicates that the program was created with the Department of Public Aid (now Human Services) to provide townships that currently levy the maximum but fail to meet their need. This program provided the additional resources to meet that need. Most are in the southern part of Illinois. The farthest north is Pembroke Township and in central Illinois, Decatur Township. The remaining are south of Springfield.

On June 21, TOI was notified that letters were being distributed to the 39 designated receiving townships in Illinois, notifying them of the elimination of fund-

ing. TOI determined that as your statewide association, we needed to provide a forum for these townships to understand what they were required to do now that their funding levels were being eliminated effective July 1, 2011. Townships must now change the course in their mandate to provide (fund) general assistance to eligible township residents.

Executive Director Bryan Smith and myself, with members of the General Assistance Training Institute (GATI), immediately initiated conversations with department representatives to determine what we could do to assist the impacted townships with fully understanding the implications of the budget elimination.

According to the DHS, General Assistance Program allowable expenses incurred in June 2011 by receiving townships are billable to DHS. In order to allow sufficient time to accurately record June expenses, DHS has agreed to accept a final Monthly Request for Funding form (787) from the receiving townships, no later than July 31, 2011. This last request was to include all medical bills that had been pending pricing from the State of Illinois; final staff vacation compensation calculations; and any other expense that would otherwise be an allowable expense. IDHS fiscal staff indicated they will perform a final reconciliation using these last requests.

This elimination does **NOT** excuse a township from their statutory mandate to provide general assistance. General assistance is a mandated function of township government and must continue to be provided to eligible electors. If the elimination of funding as a receiving township impacts your financial ability to provide this mandated service, it is imperative that your township board determine the financial condition of the township to meet this requirement.

The Township Officials of Illinois, together with GATI and representatives of DHS, scheduled a meeting on Thursday, July 28 at the Rend Lake College, Market Place in Mt. Vernon. Over 40 elected supervisors, case administrators and others attended the meeting.

The meeting assured downstate programs (including Pembroke and Decatur Townships) the following:

- General Assistance is one of the three MANDATED statutorily required services to be pro-

vided in Illinois townships. Illinois townships should **NOT** rely upon state aid to meet their obligations in relation to general assistance.

- Townships may still utilize the temporary assistance (downstate manual) to determine eligibility. The budgetary impact of keeping this program application process limits the amount of assistance provided as well as removes the township from certain medical and dental entitlements. The only issue is that townships must monitor updates to the program in the future. For a limited time, DHS agreed to keep the downstate GA manual on their department website.
- Townships may (if determined by the supervisor) adopt the general assistance handbook published by the Township Supervisors of Illinois. The TSI manual provides both flat grant and needs allowance application procedures. This may change the application process and place townships in a different liability category. It is important that this be discussed entirely.
- Townships are required to evaluate their current general assistance budgetary needs as well as their budgetary capabilities to meet this defined need.
- If the general assistance needs to be increased, this is an option that is required to be strategically evaluated.
- If the funding required does not meet the funding available to provide general assistance, the township budget may need to be amended to meet this defined need.
- Transfers from certain other funds could work to provide short-term relief, but can deprive townships of other funding. (60 ILCS 1/250-5).

Past Practices

- Under Illinois Public Aid Code, a township was eligible to receive state funds to the extent it depletes what it has generated for general assistance. 305 ILCS 5/12-21.13-14. Townships were required to maximize their receipts before they can petition the state for assistance to supplement the township general assistance fund.
- In receiving state funds, a township was required to be monitored by the agency regulations. 305

ILCS 5/12-21.16-20. There are also employee requirements and state mandated regulations regarding activities as a receiving township.

- The Illinois Public Aid Code provided statutory rationale to address the distribution of general assistance; state regulations fail to MANDATE coverage for townships that cannot meet their financial obligation for general assistance funding. Current regulations did not specifically require the state to cover medical assistance claims that accrued prior to the townships' receipt of state aid.

The 39 townships impacted in eight counties:

Franklin County: Benton, Browning, Cave, Denning, Eastern, Ewing, Frankfort, Goode, Six Mile, Tyrone

Gallatin County: Asbury, Bowlesville, Gold Hill, New Haven, Omaha, Shawnee

Kankakee County: Pembroke

Macon County: Decatur

Marion County: Alma, Carrigan, Centralia, Iuka, Kinmundy, Odin, Omega, Patoka, Sandoval

St. Clair County: Canteen, Centreville, East St. Louis, Stites

Saline County: Brushy, Carrier Mills, Eldorado, Galatia, Harrisburg, Mountain, Stonefort

White County: Indian Creek

Thank you to Department of Human Services representative Paul Thelen, as well as General Assistance Training Institute representatives Deb Burke and Melani Sepich, for being part of the discussion panel in Mt. Vernon. Their commitment to township government and general assistance statewide contributes to the program's successes.

I contacted DHS and they requested that we convey only that the funding through IDHS has ended as of July 1, and that there is no longer a requirement for any township or commission county to submit the General Assistance Monthly Report and Request for State Funds (IL444-787). The form will no longer be accepted by IDHS.

If you have any questions regarding this issue, you are welcome to e-mail me at jerry@toi.org.

