



Albemarle County

Legislation Details (With Text)

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AGENDA DATE: 12/14/2022

TITLE:
Responding to Midyear Policy Changes in DSS Benefits

SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Consider departmental request for 5.0 FTE to support additional workload in response to federal policy changes.

ITEM TYPE: Regular Action Item

STAFF CONTACT(S): Richardson, Walker, Dimock, Birch, Bowman

PRESENTER (S): Kaki Dimock

LEGAL REVIEW: Not Required

REVIEWED BY: Jeffrey B. Richardson

BACKGROUND: The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) was established to create a safety net of benefits and programs for community members during the COVID-19 public health emergency. FFCRA directed states to maintain Medicaid health coverage for everyone enrolled on or after March 18, 2020. Eligibility criteria were reduced and benefits increased during the pandemic in Medicaid, Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and other programs. During this period of continuous coverage, local departments of social services were instructed not to review eligibility for program recipients, which has resulted in dramatically increased caseloads. The public health emergency period is scheduled to end in early 2023, requiring all local departments of social services to resume normal enrollment and eligibility determinations.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) is actively planning for this unwinding of public benefits and may provide localities with temporary funding to expand staffing capacity, policy changes on case requirements, and centralizing some procedures to reduce local workload. Staff are proactively addressing this increase in workload using the best information available, adopting a conservative approach, in advance of any commitments from VDSS, as a mechanism for worker retention and workforce stabilization. While a date

of January 14, 2023 had been previously identified as a date certain, staff have been informed that it will be after this date and that local departments will be given 60 days' notice. Staff are positioning Albemarle County to be responsive to that notice.

STRATEGIC PLAN: Mission - To enhance the well-being and quality of life for all community members through the provision of the of the highest level of public service consistent with the prudent use of public funds.

DISCUSSION: As a result of the FFCRA public health emergency response, there are currently 10,455 open Medicaid cases and 3,162 open SNAP cases in Albemarle County, with each case representing several individuals. At the end of the public health crisis, every case is required to be re-evaluated to determine whether current recipients remain eligible. Current DSS staff are unable to take on the tasks of resuming normal enrollment and eligibility determination operations without additional support. Staff request permission to add 5.0 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) to assist with this transition. Staff anticipate that these FTEs will be needed for a period of 18 - 24 months, during which DSS leadership will maintain process data to determine whether and when these activities could be accomplished sufficiently with fewer staff.

The additional 3.0 FTEs in the benefits division include an eligibility worker to process eligibility determinations, an eligibility supervisor required for approving all changes, and a DSS specialist to provide administrative support. Recruitment would commence upon the 60-day notice from VDSS.

The additional 2.0 FTEs support in the Self-Sufficiency Unit are in response to the January 2023 requirement that all TANF recipients participate in the work program and the positions requested are for an employment services worker and a childcare services worker. Recruitment will begin upon approval.

BUDGET IMPACT: The cost of adding these five positions for approximately six months in Fiscal Year 2023 (FY 23) would amount to \$203,291 in total expenditures. The state would provide \$67,086 in reimbursement revenue for these positions in FY 23 and the County would fund the remaining \$136,205 from the Countywide Salary and Benefits Reserve that was previously appropriated as part of the FY 23 Adopted Budget. The cost of these positions in FY 24 would be reviewed and incorporated into the Social Services operating budget during the FY 24 budget development process.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of an additional 5.0 FTE to address workload concerns due to the unwinding of public health emergency benefits.

ATTACHMENTS: [Click here to enter text.](#)