

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact:

Jeffrey Thomas, Deputy Director
East Bay Community Law Center

(510) 548-4040 x319

(650) 888-0587 – mobile phone

jthomas@ebclc.org

www.ebclc.org

ALAMEDA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS VOTES 4-TO-1 TO SAVE GENERAL ASSISTANCE FOR COUNTY'S POOREST RESIDENTS

Berkeley, Calif., (June 24, 2008) — Community activists applauded a four to one vote by the Alameda County Board Of Supervisors to reject a proposal that would have cut general assistance (GA) payments to some of the County's poorest residents. The proposal, which would have started July 1, 2008, would require that any GA recipient deemed "employable" by the Social Services Agency have their \$336 monthly cash grant terminated after six months. "Thousands of recipients who have been told that their lifeline benefit could stop as early as July 1 can now expect to receive the checks that they depend on," said Ed Barnes, staff attorney with East Bay Community Law Center.

Despite claims from Agency staff that such a proposal would create savings in a tight budget year, a coalition of community advocates and GA recipients successfully convinced the Board to reject program cuts. The Board also created a working group to bring back recommended changes to the GA program in four months.

GA is a crucial bridge of financial assistance provided by Alameda County to residents who have no other means of support, who do not qualify for other welfare benefits or who are transitioning into Veterans benefits or other support. As a condition of receiving GA, applicants are already required to participate in employment services. Advocates argued that cuts in even the modest GA benefit would have serious negative impacts to both individuals on GA and the County as a whole. One such advocate, former Senate Pro Tem of California, John Burton intervened on behalf of the foster youth in Alameda County who rely on these benefits to meet their immediate daily needs and plan a future outside of the foster care system.

"Senator Burton has played an integral role in improving the plight of youth who "age out" of California's foster care system," said Jodie Langs, Executive Director of the Alameda County Foster Youth Alliance, a coalition of nonprofit organizations assisting current and former foster youth, ages 16 to 24. "Senator Burton's advocacy to suspend the six-month time limit on General Assistance benefits is just the latest chapter in his efforts to ensure that every youth in California makes a successful transition from foster care."

-more-

Many GA recipients still believe their benefits will stop on July 1st, which is causing a great deal of stress and has the potential for creating other problems. For example, recipients who use their GA grants to rent rooms may be making plans to move, or may even already have moved. They may have told their landlords that their benefits were about to stop and be threatened with eviction and homelessness. Advocates urged the Agency to notify all recipients about the suspension of the time limits and continuation of assistance, but the Agency has not yet committed to provide such notice. Advocates plan to spread this information with flyers and by old-fashioned word of mouth.

The decision by the Board came on the heels of a temporary restraining order issued a week earlier by the California Superior Court (Ronnie Watkins, et. al. vs. County of Alameda, et. al.) in a case filed by the law firms of HellerEhrmanLLP, Bay Area Legal Aid and Public Interest Law Project. In granting a temporary restraining order, the Superior Court called General Assistance "the welfare program of last resort," and said termination of such benefits to certain recipients would have "severe and potentially life-threatening effects on recipients." The County was ordered to re-appear in court on July 15, 2008 for a final determination that would prohibit implementation of the cuts.

ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

About Bay Area Legal Aid

Bay Area Legal Aid is the largest provider of free civil legal services in the Bay Area. Its seven regional offices provide legal assistance to low-income people regardless of their location, language, or disability. Bay Legal is uniquely positioned to help people across county lines. We assist people in the areas of housing, public benefits, health access, and domestic violence. Contact: Steven Weiss, Attorney, 510.663.4744 x5206.

About The John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes

The John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes was founded in 2004 by retired President Pro Tem of the California State Senate John Burton. Through the Foundation, Senator Burton promotes the values of nurturing children and youth who are less fortunate in life than most. His vision is the Foundation's mission: dedicated to improving the quality of life for California's homeless children and developing policy solutions to prevent homelessness. Together with the generosity of supporters, Senator Burton, through the Foundation, is vigorously working to help the most vulnerable among us – the 100,000 homeless children living in California. For more information please call 415.348.0011 or visit www.johnburtonfoundation.com.

About East Bay Community Law Center

East Bay Community Law Center was founded in 1988 by students at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law. Today, the Law Center is the East Bay's largest provider of free legal services and a nationally-recognized teaching clinic. With its motto "Justice through education and advocacy," each year more than 5,000 community members receive free legal advocacy from more than 100 students under the supervision of a dozen full-time staff attorneys. Law students come from Berkeley Law and from law schools around the country to train at the Law Center and provide assistance to clients in the areas of housing, health care, immigration, income, community reentry, and economic justice. Contact: Jeffrey Thomas at (650) 888-0587

###