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State Comptroller Audit Finds County Welfare Agencies Are Not Referring General Assistance Recipients to Mandatory Work Programs

County welfare agencies are providing financial assistance to participants in the Work First New Jersey General Assistance program without properly determining their eligibility and without referring them to required work activities, according to an Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) audit released today.

OSC's audit focused on three county agencies: the Burlington County Board of Social Services, the Camden County Board of Social Services and the Passaic County Board of Social Services. At each agency, OSC found the case files lacked required documentation to show that program recipients met eligibility requirements.

For example, OSC looked at 364 case files and found 84 of them (23 percent) did not include documentation to verify that the participant's monthly income fell within the program's thresholds. It also found 156 case files (42 percent) contained no documentation to demonstrate that the state's criminal record tracking system had been checked for disqualifying drug convictions.

The General Assistance program, funded solely through State aid and administered by county welfare agencies, provides monthly grants to eligible single adults and couples without children on the condition that they work, actively look for work or participate in an approved work activity. Examples of approved work activities include job training and community service programs. County welfare agencies are responsible for determining if an applicant is employable and for referring eligible participants to One-Stop Career Centers in order to satisfy the work requirements.

An OSC review of the December 2012 and June 2013 case files for 225 general assistance recipients found more than half did not participate in a required work activity even though they were deemed employable. In Passaic County, 86 percent of the sampled recipients did not participate in a work activity. OSC estimates that in the two months it reviewed, more than \$1 million in monthly payments could have been made to recipients who did not meet work activity requirements.

“The purpose of the Work First New Jersey General Assistance program is to provide incentive to get able-bodied people back to work,” said Acting State Comptroller Marc Larkins. “The three county welfare agencies examined in our audit need to do a better job of not only overseeing eligibility for the General Assistance program but in holding program participants to their obligation to seek employment.”

OSC auditors also found seven recipients of program benefits had a potentially disqualifying conviction for drug distribution. In Burlington County, 53 of the 55 cases reviewed did not contain documentation to show that a required check for drug offense convictions had been performed.

Expenditures for the Work First New Jersey General Assistance program totaled \$154 million and \$135 million in calendar years 2012 and 2013, respectively. OSC’s audit includes nine recommendations to address the weaknesses it identified.

OSC thanked the Division of Family Development in the Department of Human Services for its assistance with the audit.

The full report is available on OSC’s website: www.state.nj.us/comptroller