



**County of Orange**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 10, 2012

**Orange County Superior Court to Determine if Settlement of Class Action Lawsuit  
Involving General Relief Program Settlement is Fair and Reasonable**

The County of Orange has reached agreement on a comprehensive set of changes that will be made to the County's General Relief Program (GR). The detailed settlement of the recently filed class action lawsuit, *Mankinen v. County of Orange*, revises the County's standards and procedures for General Relief applications, terminations, benefit amounts, and accommodations for persons with disabilities. General Relief provides a modest amount of cash assistance, generally around \$300 per month, for adults who legally reside in Orange County and who do not have any other means of support. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit are represented by three public interest law firms – Western Center on Law & Poverty, The Public Interest Law Project, and Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund.

The recommended settlement serves the mutual interests of the proposed class members and the County. The changes will help prevent homelessness and its resulting public costs, as well as streamline administration of the program.

The Superior Court of Orange County, Judge Nancy Wieben Stock, has granted preliminary approval of the settlement. Starting August 1, 2012, members of the proposed class (past and present GR applicants and recipients) are being notified about the settlement and given an opportunity to object. A final hearing to determine if the settlement is fair and reasonable will be held at 8:30 a.m. on October 10, 2012, at the Orange County Superior Court. If the Court approves the settlement, the County will issue regulations and policies that implement the settlement requirements and establish a claims procedure for class members. The types of relief class members might receive include:

- A modest increase in monthly benefit amounts (generally, \$38 for a single person).
- An opportunity for applicants to request retroactive relief if they were improperly denied or underpaid GR benefits at any time after August 24, 2010.
- GR benefits if they were previously denied but are now eligible under the revised standards.
- Additional protections regarding the imposition of sanctions or terminations, including expanded opportunities to establish good cause for failure to meet program requirements.
- A more streamlined application process.
- Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities (such as, assistance with forms and appointments at other SSA Regional offices).

For further information, please contact Terry Lynn Fisher, Public Information Officer, Orange County Social Services Agency, (714) 541-7734, or one of the following attorneys for plaintiffs: Stephanie Haffner, Western Center on Law and Poverty, (213) 487-235-2617; Steve Ronfeldt, The Public Interest Law Project (510) 891-9794, ext. 127; and, Larisa Cummings or Shira Wakschlag of Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, (510) 644-2555.