



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: September 25, 2012

Prepared By/Phone Number: David A. Salazar 854-4107

Elected/Appointed Official/Dept. Head: Sherri E. Fleming,
County Executive for Health and Human Services and Veterans Service

Commissioners Court Sponsor: Judge Samuel T. Biscoe

AGENDA LANGUAGE:

Consider and Take Appropriate Action to Approve the FY2013 Customer Assistance Program Plus 1 Funding (CAPS) Application.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:

City of Austin – Austin Energy allocates funding to provide emergency utility assistance to low income individuals and families at or below 200% of the current Federal Poverty Income Guidelines on a quarterly basis to recipient agencies within the City of Austin. Those agencies submit the granted client assistance amount to Austin Energy for customer billing credits. The amount of the allocation from the City of Austin – Austin Energy last year was \$90,000.

Staff requests the acceptance and authorization to apply for funding during the FY2013 period.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends that the Court accept and authorize the application for funding to the City of Austin's Customer Assistance Program Plus 1 (CAPS).

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

The department has participated in this program for a number of years. Within the current program period, the department has assisted over 377 households with their Austin Energy utility bills.

AGENDA REQUEST DEADLINE: All agenda requests and supporting materials must be submitted as a pdf to Cheryl Aker in the County Judge's office, Cheryl.Aker@co.travis.tx.us by Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m. for the next week's meeting.

The Customer Assistance Program Plus 1 funds direct assistance to clients. These funds are used to supplement the Federal, State and local grant funds enabling the department to extend utility assistance to indigent individuals and families seeking aid from Travis County's Emergency Assistance offices.

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

No matching funds are required. No actual funding checks are received from the City of Austin – Austin Energy and no payments are processed. Decisions are typically made concerning these applications with the month after submission. The current contract period is 10/01/2011 through 09/30/2012.

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

Mary Etta Gerhardt, Assistant County Attorney

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**TRAVIS COUNTY HEALTH and HUMAN SERVICES
and VETERANS SERVICE**

100 North I.H. 35
P. O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

**Sherri E. Fleming
County Executive
(512) 854-4100
Fax (512) 854-4115**

Date: September 18, 2012

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSIONERS COURT

FROM:

Sherri E. Fleming

Sherri E. Fleming, County Executive
Travis County Health and Human Services and Veterans Service

SUBJECT: Acceptance of FY13 Customer Assistance Program Plus 1 Funding (CAPS) Application

Proposed Motion: Consider and take appropriate action to approve the FY13 Customer Assistance Program Plus 1 Funding (CAPS) Application.

Summary and Staff Recommendation: Staff requests the acceptance and authorization to apply for funding for the FY13 period. The amount of the allocation from the City of Austin, Austin Energy last year was \$90,000. The allocation awarded for this program are used to provide emergency utility assistance for Austin Energy billings of Travis County's low-income individuals and families who have an income at or below 200% of the current Federal Poverty Income Guidelines. The City of Austin, Austin Energy, allocates funding quarterly to the recipient agencies within the City of Austin and those agencies submit the granted client assistance amounts to Austin Energy for customer billing credits.

Budgetary and Fiscal Impact: No matching funds are required. No actual funding checks are received from the City of Austin, Austin Energy and no payments are processed. We expect a decision to be made concerning our application within the next month. The current contract period was 10-01-11 through 09-30-12.

Issues and Opportunities: The department has participated in this program for a number of years. Within the current program period, the department has assisted over 377 households with their Austin Energy utility bills.

We will use all of the Customer Assistance Program Plus 1 funds for direct assistance to clients. These funds are used to supplement the Federal, State, and local grant funds to enable the department to extend utility assistance to indigent individuals and families who seek aid from the department.

cc: Leslie Browder, County Executive, Planning and Budget Office
Diana Ramirez, Budget Analyst Sr., Planning and Budget Office
Nicki Riley, CPA, Travis County Auditor
Jose Palacios, Chief Assistant County Auditor
Michelle Gable, Auditor Analyst II, County Auditors Office
Cyd Grimes, C.P.M., CPPO, Travis County Purchasing Agent
Jim Lehrman, Social Services Director, Family Support Services



**Emergency Financial Assistance Program (Plus 1)
Community Partner Application Summary Form**



Date: September 18, 2012 Please check one: New Request Renewal Request

Organization Name Travis County through Travis County Health and Human Services & Veterans Service

Alternate name/acronym

Address 100 N. IH 35

City Austin

State TX

Zip Code 78701

Project Contact Person

Name Tonda Owens

Title Social Services Program Administrator

Phone 512-854-4113

Email tondalier.owens@co.travis.tx.us

Areas affected by project (cities, counties, zip codes, etc.)

entire area of Travis County

Employer/Taxpayer ID number (EIN/TIN) 74-6000192

Year organization established 1936

Number of paid employees 53

Number of volunteers 45

Organizational Financial Information

Organization budget for current year FY12 \$5,154,448

Organization expenditure total for last year FY11 \$5,070,967

Organization revenue total for last year \$0. This program division does not generate revenue for Travis County

With my signature I certify the following: (1) The above information is correct; (2) I am authorized by the governing board of this organization to submit this grant application; (3) this organization is in good standing with the IRS; (4) this organization does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, sexual preference, physical circumstances or national origin.

Samuel T. Biscoe

Travis County Judge

Name (printed) of program administrator

Title

Signature of program administrator

Date



Emergency Financial Assistance Program (Plus 1) Community Partner Application Summary Form



Required Materials: Four complete packages (unstapled, unbound) that includes:

- Application summary form (one page)
- Project description (Times New Roman, 12-point font, single-spaced, with one-inch margins)

Includes the following:

- Project Summary/Abstract (one page)
- Objectives and Need for Assistance
- Outcomes Expected
- Approach
- Program Infrastructure
- Mission
- Budget

Due in our office by 5:00pm September 24, 2012. If you plan to mail your package, please take this into consideration.

Customer Assistance Program

Austin Energy

721 Barton Springs Road

Austin, Texas 78704

Travis County Health and Human Services and Veterans Service
Emergency Financial Assistance Program (Plus 1)
Community Partner Application 2012-2013

Project Title: Emergency Financial Assistance Program (Plus 1) Community Partner Application 2012-2013

Applicant Name: Travis County through Travis County Health and Human Services and Veterans Service/ Family Support Services

Address: 100 N. IH 35, Ste. 2000, Austin, TX 78701

Contact Name: Tondalier Owens **Contact Phone Numbers:** 512-854-4113; 854-4118 (fax)

E-Mail Address: tondalier.owens@co.travis.tx.us

Web Site Address: http://www.co.travis.tx.us/health_human_services/default.asp

Project Summary/Abstract

Under Texas Local Government Code, Section 81.028, -each Commissioners Court may provide for the support of paupers, residents of their County, who are unable to support themselves. Within Travis County, the Health and Human Services and Veterans Service Department (HHS/VS) is charged with that responsibility. For more than 76 years (since 1936), TCHHS/VS has provided basic needs assistance to low income, elderly and disabled residents at its community centers throughout the County, using a variety of funding streams, including the Austin Energy's Emergency Assistance Program, to provide basic needs assistance. TC/HHSVS emergency assistance programs include utility assistance, rent and mortgage assistance, prescription assistance, home repair/weatherization referrals and assistance with indigent burials.

Because of consistently growing demands and diminishing resources, Travis County Health and Human Services and Veteran Services, through the Family Support Services (FSS) Division, is requesting to continue to be awarded Emergency Assistance Plus 1 Funding, in order to be able to provide individuals facing financial hardships with financial assistance to pay their utility bills. The Emergency Assistance funding that Austin Energy awards to Travis County provides for diversified funding to serve an expanded target population, that includes individuals up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, a growing demographic within our County.

Objectives and Need for Assistance

Need

HHS/VS is the largest provider of basic needs assistance for individuals and families within Travis County. Last year, HHS/VS assisted a total of 83,852 individuals at its seven community centers located in Downtown Austin, Del Valle, Manor, Oak Hill, South Austin, Pflugerville and Jonestown.

Utility Assistance Highest Utilized or In-Demand Service - Utility assistance was the second largest type of assistance provided to clients, behind mortgage/rental assistance in 2011. More than 28,000 individuals were provided with assistance to specifically help pay for utility bills. \

Increase in Overall Demand for Services - The total number of clients seeking HHS/VS assistance has also increased as the population has grown and economic growth has remained slow. In 2010 (the most recent data available) 375,147 Travis County residents (37% of residents) had incomes below 200% of the poverty threshold. This is a 66% increase since 2000 when 225,811 residents had incomes below 200% of the poverty level. FSS staff reports seeing more families that have never needed to utilize County social services before. FSS has to begin waitlists in order to be able to serve individuals interested in receiving services.

Decrease in Supplemental Funding - In 2012, HHS/VS also realized a 40% decrease in the Comprehensive Energy Assistance Program, or CEAP program, one of the supplemental funding sources for utility assistance, thereby placing a larger burden on the County's internal funding source, known as Chapter 72 to be able to meet the growing demand for services.

Objectives

The *principal objective* for this funding request is to ensure that HHS/VS implement its mandate to provide basic needs to the community. In this particular instance, the specific need is that of utility assistance. The Austin Energy's Emergency Financial Assistance Program (EFAP) will provide a steady financial stream to support its most vulnerable community residents during times of economic or financial hardship.

Secondary Objective The EFAP likewise provides the County with diversified funding that complements its existing general fund and other grant funding to be able to serve an expanded number of clients that may otherwise not have been served.

Complementary to HHS/VS Mission: TCHHS/VS' collaboration with Austin Energy on the EFAP program will allow the department to further its mission of "*assisting residents toward achieving maximum self-sufficiency and quality of health, economic and social well-being.*"

Approach (Workflow)

Emergency assistance, in the form of financial assistance for utilities, rent/mortgage, food vouchers, or food provisions from the food supply closet is provided on a case by case eligibility basis. Should an individual or family be requiring assistance, they complete an application in-person or electronically, provided by a *caseworker* at each community center.

This *pre-screening*, as it is referred to, will help the caseworker, gauge what types of assistance that particular individual or family may qualify for, based on his or her respective situation. Applicants for assistance are asked to self-report on such items as household income, economic situation, age, resource/assets, residency and other types of assistance s/he has received in the past. If after reviewing this pre-screening application, the caseworker will either schedule a follow-up appointment with that individual/household if the initial contact was via phone or fill

out additional materials, as relevant, to get that individual/household the assistance s/he or they need.

Eligibility Criteria In order to actually qualify for assistance, a household will need to be *income-eligible* (200% of the Federal Poverty Level or below) and/or have experienced a verifiable *economic crisis* within the past 60 days; be a *Travis County resident* for at least 60 days prior to application for assistance and can provide proof to that extent, be able to provide some form of identification, such as a Drivers' License or Texas Identification (Verify); be at least 18 years of age and/or, if applicable, be in a situation where their or their families' safety or well-being may be at risk. Households are typically only allowed to request assistance once a year; however in certain instances, e.g. if the person is elderly or disabled and/or can provide proof of participating in a *workforce development activity* (such as education, or employment training), additional assistance may be granted.

Documentation Applicants must provide *proof of income*. In the case when income is unavailable, an applicant must sign a declaration of income statement. Proof of income can include either: money/wages, or salaries before deductions; self-employment receipts; benefits payments from social security or other retirement type funds; union-, workers' compensation, veterans' payments; or other public assistance benefits (TANF/SSI); or, alimony/child support or military allotments.

An *economic crisis* could include, but may not be limited to instances where there are unforeseen increased expenditures, such as medical expenses, transportation, auto repairs, funeral expenses, or recent increase in utility expense. It could also include instances where there has been a loss or reduction of income due to a job loss, reduction in hours/pay, or the death of a household member who had provided household support, for example.

In all instances, all staff interacting with the public, including the supervising managers of each Center, will adhere to strict policies and procedures set forth by the County, State, and other applicable oversight agencies or funders. They will also be sure to adhere to professional standards set forth by their respective professions, e.g. social work, to ensure that all community members receive equal access to basic needs services and are served with confidentiality, dignity, and respect.

Community Collaboration –FSS staff also provide reference to other community agencies for specific services needed, e.g. Goodwill and Workforce Solutions for employment training. In addition, FSS is committed and involved in collaboration with other agencies within the community, such as the Downtown Community Alliance, ECHO, Behavioral Health Planning Partnership, South Austin Alliance of Ministries, and the AE Discount Steering Committee.

Program Infrastructure (Organizational Capacity/Quality Assurance)

The Family Support Services Division of the Health and Human Services and Veterans' Service Department is the agency's largest division with a total of 53 FTEs, including the *FSS Division Director*. He oversees all staff at the 7 centers throughout the county and additional social work staff that provide both general and specific support to grant-funded programs, such as the

Travis County Health and Human Services and Veterans Service
Emergency Financial Assistance Program (Plus 1)
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Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) Program.

Staff There are 7 *Social Service Program Administrators* that serve functionally as Center Managers, overseeing the day to day operations, including personnel and financial situations at each one of the Centers.

The Emergency Assistance Program, currently operates and will continue to operate as follows: Once an applicant is deemed eligible for the Austin Energy Emergency Financial Assistance Program at a Center, that applicant will need to furnish a copy of the Austin Energy bill to the Caseworker, who enters the specific information, such as customer identification number, client name and amount of bill, into the department's client database system, known as CABA, or Case Management and Benefits Administration System. This system, serves as the department's client tracking system noting client eligibility, verification, and types of assistance provided, by funder or program.

Quality Assurance: Client data for granted program assistance is entered on a daily basis by each caseworker into the CABA system. The program assistance billings are reviewed weekly by each division's site Social Service Program Administrator (SSPA). Upon approval from the SSPA, the approved program assistance billings are sent to the Department's finance division. The accountant audits these billings for appropriateness and completeness and approves the program assistance billings in the CABA system. The Financial Manager approves the cumulative statement for the approved program assistance billings. The approved invoice list of program assistance billings is faxed to the Manager of the Customer Services Management division at Austin Energy for posting purposes.

The monthly reports from Austin Energy are reconciled to the paid invoices list from the CABA system. Any discrepancies are reconciled with Austin Energy as needed.

Client Confidentiality – Client information entered into CABA is confidential, as all staff are clearly instructed and aware of privacy information clauses associated in working with clients. Access to CABA is also limited to only those staff having client access and eligibility determination or file review. Access to the database is password secure, and access must be given by both the Social Services Program Administrator. The CABA Administrator must ultimately give clearance to be able to enter and work within the CABA database.

The CABA Administrator, co-located within the FSS department, also serves as a resource to assist, if any technological or database issues should arise with the tracking system.

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Mission (LOGIC MODEL TABLE)

Mission: The mission of Family Support Services Division within HHSVS is to assist residents towards achieving maximum self-sufficiency and quality of health, economic and social well-being.			
Goal: To ensure that clients' basic need for utility assistance is provided in times of need or hardship			
Assumptions: That the number of clients qualifying for assistance will be growing, as the County's population continues to grow.			
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Social Service Program Administrator	Program Oversight, Staff Supervision, Austin Energy Liaison	<u>Number of client files reviewed</u> <u>Number of Invoices Reviewed</u>	<u>Continued utility coverage and basic need met for clients</u> <u>Greater internal control</u>
Caseworker	Client eligibility, database entry, client consultation; referral	Number of clients served	Continued utility coverage; basic need met for clients
Accountant	Data review; Invoice Processing; Quality Assurance; Reconcile monthly reports	Number of Invoices Reviewed Number of Invoices Processed	Greater efficiency and effectiveness; internal control

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Budget

ATMOS	\$34,167	UTILITY
EFSP	\$80,571	UTILITY
CEAP	\$2,573,721	UTILITY
CAPS	\$90,000	UTILITY
TEXAS GAS SERVICE	\$33,271	UTILITY
TXU	\$80,068	UTILITY
PEC	\$105,469	UTILITY
TRAVIS COUNTY FUNDS	\$1,668,325	UTILITY, RENT/MORTGAGE, BURIAL, FOOD, PRESCRIPTION

Annual Budget for Direct Financial Support in FY 2012-2013: \$1,565,227