

# CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

## Contra Costa in settlement with benefits recipients

By Rick Radin  
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 01/12/2010 08:41:37 PM PST

Updated: 01/12/2010 08:41:47 PM PST

MARTINEZ — Contra Costa County will end long waits for welfare benefits and eliminate requirements for job searches and medical evaluations in the settlement of a lawsuit filed by general assistance recipients who were forced to wait months for their benefits.

Contra Costa had sought to save money by increasing processing times for general assistance and other programs. It faces a loss of millions in state funding this year under Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed budget announced Friday.

Attorneys for the recipients said the settlement will save the county money in the long run by reducing homelessness. They cited a survey that reported that a homeless person costs the public at least \$40,000 per year in increased public health, law enforcement, and other costs.

In the settlement, the county agreed to pay welfare recipients retroactive to their dates of application. General assistance is a county program that pays about \$336 a month.

"Our clients are very pleased about the settlement," said Katherine Siegfried of Bay Area Legal Aid. "The

fairly small amount of money that they will receive to compensate them for the months that they had to wait before receiving any aid will mean a lot to them."

The county hired 15 employees to process general assistance applications in October and new workers have enabled the county employment and human services department to meet the waiting time limit of 45 days specified in the settlement, said Wendy Therrian, the department's workforce services director.

The department has been caught in a bind between mandated layoffs and increasing demand for service. It cut 203 out of about 1,600 positions because of county budget reductions in December 2008. Between May of 2008 and October, general assistance applications increased 126 percent and applications for CalWORKs, the state-funded welfare-to-work program, jumped 64 percent.

Continuing demand for food and financial assistance is reflected in crowding at welfare offices, Therrian said. More than 1,000 welfare applicants showed up at a branch office in Antioch on Jan. 4, the first Monday following the holidays, she said.

The department has posted a Web site, [contracostabenefits.org](http://contracostabenefits.org), that helps applicants determine if they qualify for benefits before filing an application.

"We've really taken a look at where we can build in some efficiencies so we can expedite services," Therrian said.

**Contact Rick Radin at 925-952-5053**

Advertisement

**SATISFIES APPETITES.**



**SATISFIES ACCOUNTANTS.**



**SATISFIES ALL DAY LONG.**

Prices and participation may vary.  
©2009 McDonald's.

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™