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ON LAW & POVERTY

ICLS

INLAND COUNTIES  
LEGAL SERVICES, INC.



PUBLIC INTEREST  
LAW PROJECT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**With legal settlement, Riverside County now providing  
General Assistance to over 4,000 individuals in deep poverty,  
up from 100 in 2018**

*Changes to county policy means thousands in Riverside County,  
particularly adults experiencing homelessness, can now access vital cash  
benefits*

Riverside, CA -- A settlement has been reached with Riverside County in *Isabel Bojorquez, et al. v. County of Riverside, et al.*, a lawsuit filed on behalf of three General Assistance (GA) recipients to change policies under the county's GA program. GA is the program of last resort for the poorest Californians – indigent residents who cannot qualify for other benefit programs.

Western Center on Law & Poverty, Inland Counties Legal Services, Inc., and the Public Interest Law Project are the attorneys on the case.

Before the case began, there were roughly 100 people in Riverside County receiving GA each month. In the time since litigation began in 2018, that number has increased to more than 4,000 people each month, according to the latest available data.

The settlement includes an agreement by the county to end its prior illegal policy limiting homeless recipients to six months of housing assistance payments. The county will now only end housing assistance payments where the recipient declines an offer of available shelter without a good reason.

"People experiencing the kind of poverty that qualifies them for General Assistance usually have little to no resources. General Assistance can be vital for a person's ability to rent a room or find a motel where they can sleep," said Alex Prieto, an attorney at Western Center on Law & Poverty.

Riverside County will issue guidance to workers and train them on the county's obligation to provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities. The county will also review previous applications for a limited period and issue retroactive payments to anyone denied under the former policy.

“I’m hopeful that this outcome in Riverside will prompt other counties to revisit their policies and approach to General Assistance as well,” said attorney Anthony Kim of Inland Counties Legal Services, Inc.

These changes come after others the county made in response to litigation pressure, and across two previous mediation sessions. To date, the county has raised GA grant amounts, raised resource limits, simplified application processes, issued guidance regarding due process, and ended a policy that required employable recipients to re-apply for benefits every month, even though their circumstances were unchanged.

“Increasing General Assistance across the board in California counties, and simplifying the process for people to access it, could provide a significant stop-gap in our state’s battle against homelessness and increasing poverty,” said Lauren Hansen, an attorney at the Public Interest Law Project. “This is a good example of the kinds of things counties can do, ideally without the need for litigation, to curb deep poverty in their jurisdictions.”

**For questions about the settlement, contact:**

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[About Western Center on Law & Poverty](#)

Western Center on Law & Poverty fights for justice and system-wide change to secure housing, health care, racial justice and a strong safety net for low-income Californians. Western Center attains real-world, policy solutions for clients through litigation, legislative and policy advocacy, and technical assistance and legal support for the state’s legal aid programs. Western Center is California’s oldest and largest legal services support center.

[About Inland Counties Legal Services, Inc. \(ICLS\)](#)

Inland Counties Legal Services, Inc. (“ICLS”) is the largest non-profit legal aid organization in the Inland Empire with offices located in Riverside, Indio, San Bernardino, Victorville and Rancho Cucamonga. ICLS is dedicated to securing justice and equality for low-income people in the communities of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, through litigation, counsel, advice, and community education.

[About the Public Interest Law Project \(PILP\)](#)

Since 1996, the Public Interest Law Project (PILP) has provided crucial litigation and advocacy support to local legal services and public interest law programs throughout California. The primary purposes of PILP are to assist local legal services programs in rendering legal services to lower income persons who are financially unable to afford legal assistance, and to provide technical assistance, training, research and litigation support to public interest law programs and community based organizations on law and policy issues related to housing and community development, public benefits, health, education, welfare, and civil, consumer and economic rights.