

Federal funds cut-off near

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With less than seven days before the complete cutoff of federal general assistance programs for Alaska Natives, only recommendations but no hard and fast programs have been proposed to meet the need caused by the assistance cutoff.

The cutoff of assistance to 3,400 Alaska Natives had been warned for several months but no official state action had been taken on what to do for the Alaska Natives affected by the cutoff, according to one legislative aide.

State Rep. Al Adams recently sent a letter to Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner Helen Bierre and BIA commissioner Jake Lestenkoff recently completed a joint impact analysis of the effects of the

cutoff on the state and made numerous recommendations. None has been acted upon.

The analysis points out that the BIA general assistance funding provides more money to Alaska Natives than the state general relief funding does.

General assistance provides as much as \$600 per month for a seven-person household. That money can be used as the recipients see fit such as for buying bullets to hunt with or netting to fish with.

The state provides a maximum of \$80 per person, per household monthly and limits that money to emergency rent or utility relief. Other programs provide food stamps, aid to dependent children and other services.

The state of Alaska and the BIA recently sent letters to all persons receiving general as-

sistance telling them that they will be cutoff from funding and suggesting what they can do to get other funding.

Those suggestions include instructions on how to get emergency utility and rent money. A short list of other programs such as the food stamp program, Aid for Dependent Children, adult assistance program for aged, blind or disabled persons, and the energy assistance program is included.

But on the larger level, proposals have only been put forward for an answer to the people who will be out of the general assistance funding.

The BIA has suggested that a period of transition be worked out so general assistance families may restructure their economic needs gradually instead of facing a total cutoff.

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Alaska Natives general assistance in jeopardy

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A client education program also was suggested so that general assistance clients understand the differences in the state and federal program.

The BIA also suggested the state determine in advance who is eligible to receive assistance to shorten the time between federal cutoff and state assumption of services.

The BIA also recommended that the state re-evaluate all

aspects of its general relief program to see if the program can help families meet the actual cost of a minimal subsistence lifestyle in Alaska.

The BIA offered its staff to help the state prepare and undertake the increase in general relief activity caused by the BIA cutoff.

In the report, the BIA points out that state welfare offices are working under a staffing shortage of 20 per-

cent fewer staff members. The report estimates that 14 new workers would be required to adequately staff the office to handle the new recipients.

The BIA also states the applicants for Aid for Dependent Children and food stamps must wait for from one to two months for eligibility decisions if they live in Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, or Wasilla.

The report states that that

situation "violates program regulations and constitutes unacceptable service levels for the state's needy population."

The report also states that the welfare department computer system which is being developed can't be installed in rural areas for at least 18 months.

State officials warned that state's program cannot fill the gap left by the BIA termination of the general assistance program and has recommended an end to the state's current general relief program on June 30.

With that general relief program end, the department would modify other assistance programs to help compensate make up for the loss of the BIA monies.

The state department also presented five proposals which include:

- * Discontinuing the state's general relief program as of June 30 and modifying the other state programs to compensate for the loss of benefits and services to Alaska's needy citizens.

- * Continuing the current general relief program and the

state eligibility rules and standards and payment levels, which would cost an additional \$4.6 million in the state fiscal year 1983.

- * Modifying the general relief program to better serve all "clients with clear or limitations and and accountability."

- * Adopting the Aid for Dependent Children Unemployed Parents program which provides assistance to families with the father still in the home. The current AFDC program requires that the father ~~not~~ be in the home and this proposal allows the family to remain together.

Adams has also proposed that the state add \$4 million to the general assistance budget to help pay the cost of the added Alaska Natives on the program. He would also require the Department of Health and Social Services to work up a new general relief program to meet the needs of rural Alaskans as well as urban needy.

The proposal was to be discussed this week at a hearing of House Finance Committee hearing on the Department's budget.