



Goodhue County
Health and Human Services

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DATE: May 19th, 2026
TO: Goodhue County Personnel Committee
FROM: Nina Arneson, GCHHS Director
RE: **Hire Up to Four (4) Temporary Eligibility Workers – 67 Day or 14 Hour/Week**

REQUEST:

Hire up to four (4) temporary, fully trained Health Care Eligibility Workers (EWs) to address the critical backlog in the Elderly & Disabled Unit (EDU), mitigate impacts of extended vacancy and turnover, cover upcoming leave, and meet increased workload demands related to H.R.1 implementation.

BACKGROUND:

Goodhue County HHS continues to experience significant challenges in our EDU workload, resulting from ongoing staff turnover, retirements, increased case complexities, and substantial processing delays. Our Income Maintenance Unit and Front Desk teams collaborated to implement some significant team and process changes, which have shown incredible benefit and work efficiencies. Even with these truly amazing efforts by our HHS professionals, the situation has worsened considerably since the Personnel and HHS Board approved the [prior request in September 2024](#).

In the September 2024 request, the EDU backlog was already significant. We had 139 MAXIS health care cases pending, including 114 pending more than 60 days. At that time, EDU was 91 days out, meaning that applications would not receive their first review for 91 days. The prior request also highlighted the extensive training burden for Income Maintenance programs and noted that we had five Eligibility Workers that had been hired and trained since 2022.

Since that time, EDU staffing instability has accelerated. Two of our most experienced healthcare-trained Eligibility Workers have retired, additional EDU workers have resigned, and the remaining seasoned staff continue to shoulder disproportionate workloads, overtime and training duties.

CURRENT CONDITIONS:

- 1) Severe Backlog and Delays
As of today, EDU has:
 - a. 142 pending Medical Assistance (MA) applications
 - b. Processing delays reaching 185 days (six months) – double the 91 day delay from 2024These delays leave clients without active MA coverage. While standard MA can be retroactively approved, Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) clients cannot receive retroactive coverage in the same way, resulting in delayed access to critical services such as equipment, home modifications, waiver services, and transitions from higher levels of care.
- 2) Turnover, Vacancies, and Training Requirements
The time required to hire, onboard, and train an Eligibility Worker to handle Health Care programs is a minimum of one year.
A seasoned worker retired on 12/31/2025, and this position has been vacant for six months after waiting through the lengthy hiring and background check process.
- 3) Upcoming Leave Coverage Need

One eligibility worker will be on a leave beginning June 2026, most of which will be unpaid leave. There is no internal capacity to redistribute this caseload without further accelerating backlogs.

- 4) Increased Workload Due to H.R.1 (2025-2027 Phase-In)
H.R.1 Implementation is significantly increasing administrative responsibilities. The biggest impacts to our entire Income Maintenance Unit will begin July 2026 with an increase in renewals. These changes mean increased case touches, reducing the available time for us to process new applications as they continue to come in. Counties statewide were advised to expect an increased administrative workforce due to these upcoming changes.
- 5) Staff Burnout and Unsustainable Overtime
Two of our remaining workers continue to work substantial overtime to keep cases moving. This mirrors concerns raised in our previous request, which documented rising overtime costs.

IMPACTS TO THE COMMUNITY:

These impacts have now intensified due to extended delays and fewer trained staff for more complex cases. Delays of this magnitude continue to have impacts including:

- Applicants experience extended wait times for determining eligibility for healthcare and public assistance
- Delayed medical care and inability to obtain vital medications
- Hospitals and Long-Term Care (LTC) providers cannot transition clients to less-restrictive, less costly settings due to delayed MA approval.
- Over 50 Goodhue County residents are currently pending initial waiver services that have already been screened and meet waiver eligibility. These clients cannot access services without their MA-LTC being approved.
- HCBS waiver assessments may expire before MA approval, requiring reassessments and delaying services further (plus doubling work for HCBS care coordinators)
- Staff burnout and rising overtime costs continue to strain the team

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS:

The position vacated due to a retirement that has been vacant for six months was budgeted at an annual cost of \$99,434, resulting in approximately \$49,717 in savings for the first half of the year.

Using a conservative estimate at Step 6 (\$36.78/hour) for 14 hours per week over 26 weeks, the total wage cost for all four part-time workers, including FICA and Medicare, is \$57,648.

This estimate is based on Step 6 solely for budgeting purposes. Actual pay rates for temporary workers will be determined according to standard hiring practices, with placement anywhere within the approved Eligibility Worker salary range of \$32.45-50.27 per hour, depending on qualifications and experience.

In addition, laptops will need to be purchased for these temporary workers. Even with the added technology costs, **we expect this staffing plan to be budget-neutral or minimally impactful** overall due to the **position vacancy and planned unpaid leave**.

RECRUITMENT APPROACH:

In recent years other counties have had the same urgent needs and requests and have successfully used similar short-term staffing solutions to address healthcare eligibility backlogs. Experienced Eligibility Workers have been willing to provide part-time, temporary support across county lines.

We intend to use the same approach by contacting seasoned retirees from GCHHS and leveraging regional networks of current EWs who have recently provided temporary, part-time support to other counties.

RECOMMENDATION: GCHHS Department recommends approval as requested.