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7 226 Court throws out study for assistance

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Plumas County must establish new standards for housing and utilities under the county's General Assistance program.

Visiting Superior Court Judge Noel Watkins ruled last month that a study of local costs for General Assistance recipients, done by the county in December, is not adequate in the areas of housing and utilities.

Watkins accepted General Assistance payment levels established by the county for transportation, household operations and clothing, he said in his January 30 decision.

The action stems from a welfare rights claim filed in November by Portola resident

Myrtle Hart, 54, and the California Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations. The suit filed for Hart by Legal Services of Northern California claimed that the county's standards for general relief violate federal and state laws providing for minimal care.

Prior to a hearing on December 16, the Plumas County Board of Supervisors approved revised standards for general relief eligibility which established housing costs for one person at \$112 a month.

The figure was taken from a random sample of 122 households, but included some households who reported "0" rent, Watkins said.

"The fact that some may be

able to live in their car or in a park is not relevant in establishing the level of assistance necessary to provide minimally adequate housing," said Watkins.

Watkins also found the county's study of utility costs for General Assistance recipients invalid. He ordered it to abandon the \$21 level it established in December, and to use the previously established level of a maximum of \$81 a month until the new study has been completed.

Watkins denied the welfare groups' request for injunctive relief in the areas of transportation, household and clothing.