

# Homeless aid funds in limbo

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It won't be known until early January whether the Santa Cruz area will get \$20,000 it expected this year in federal money to feed and house the homeless.

Also at stake is increased funds for 1986 since the Federal Emergency Management Agency's allocation has increased to \$70 million next year from the \$20 million allocated in 1985.

Both decisions are expected when the FEMA board meets Jan. 6 in Washington D.C.

Santa Cruz County nearly missed out on the money when FEMA decided in November that this area has a 11.8 percent poverty, just under the 12 percent needed to get into the \$20 million pot.

Local officials and U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta, D-Monterey, convinced FEMA Board Chairman Dennis Kwiattkowski to accept a local poverty level of 12.2 percent that excluded students and others in institutional housing.

According to Panetta's aide, Barry Toiv, the congressman wrote to Kwiattkowski, "Private voluntary organizations in Santa Cruz County rely on these funds as their primary source of funding to provide desperately needed emergency food and shelter relief. The number of homeless in this country has increased dramatically (and) many organizations that provide urgent food and shelter relief are unable to meet this heightened demand."

In his letter, Panetta, who chairs the House Subcommittee on Nutrition and the Task force on Domestic Hunger, noted that Santa Cruz Coun-

ty's poverty rate is 12.2 percent, which would qualify the county for aid under the program's present rules.

Panetta arranged a meeting between Kwiattkowski and Fred Gray, executive director of the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County and the chairman of the county's local FEMA Board.

The meeting was held Dec. 2 and Gray and the congressman convinced Kwiattkowski to accept the 12.2 percent.

Gray said, "We understood this funding was temporary but we also understand our local economy: the vacancy rate is 1 percent in the city, 3 percent in the county and that shows there is a crisis situation here.

"We decided at that time (when FEMA excluded Santa Cruz) to try to nail down what the criteria were. It wasn't easy to get a statement. We were told the county's poverty rate was 11.8 percent when in fact the 1980 census says it's 12.2 percent. So by only two-tenths of a percent, we were going to lose funding."

He said that the last allocation provided \$40,000 for food and \$45,701 to shelter. Part of the money was in rental assistance to prevent evictions. More than 6,000 shelter days were purchased.

In the last allocation, FEMA distributed \$70 million (Santa Cruz got some \$85,000), and the 1986 allocation is for \$70 million.

Panetta said, "It is my hope that FEMA's national board will make restitution to Santa Cruz County and the other counties damaged by this short-sighted action.

"I also assume Santa Cruz will be eligible for 1986 funding."