

CCWRO Welfare News

Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc.
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California On-Line Applications Saga - Feds Find California Out of Compliance - Corrective Action Plans Not Carried Out by California as Promised

California has three distinct “on-line welfare application systems”. Benefits CalWIN, C4Yourself and Los Angeles DPSS Leader. Whenever an update is needed, instead of having to update one system, all three systems must be updated to do the same thing.

The three computer systems are CalWIN in 18 counties, C-IV in for 39 counties and LEADER in Los Angeles County. This year, in response to pressures from the federal government, California has decided to go down to two computer systems-CalWIN and the New Leader system that may go live in several years. The plan is that these two systems will talk to each other. The single state agencies administering the Medi-Cal, Food Stamp and CalWORKs (TANF at the federal level) will have access to both systems and will actually have a clue of what is happening with the programs they are responsible for.

The CalWORKs, Food Stamps and Medi-Cal programs are required to be administered by a single state agency. However, currently these programs are operated through multiple systems without the state agencies having direct access to those systems. Child Welfare Services has one system for 58 counties. IHSS has CMISP single system for 58 counties. Child Support has a single system for 58 counties.

CalWIN received a million dollars to set up an on-line application system from the Food Nutrition Services (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture, FNS. FNS just gave the money to this private profit making company and did not even verify that the on-line system met the federal standards.

Several years later, FNS realized that they have contributed taxpayer dollars for a system that is operating in violation of federal law.

In a December 30, 2010, FNS mailed a letter to DSS, outline multiple violations of to federal law in the CalWIN on-line CalFresh application system funded by the federal government.

On March 30, 2011 DSS sent FNS a “corrective action plan” (CAP). The CAP included 20 action items. All of these corrections were supposed to have been in place by July 11, 2011. [While welfare recipients would be forced to sign many welfare documents under penalty of perjury, welfare officials are rarely asked to sign anything under penalty of perjury.] The CAP had no teeth. It was not signed under penalty of perjury. It was just another promise – promises that state welfare agencies often make knowing they cannot keep it. When a welfare recipient makes a promise to provide verification and do not keep that promise- all benefits are stopped. There is zero concern that the family will go hungry, become homeless, suffer misery.

As of August 18, over 30 days from the date that DSS promised to make changes in the Benefits CalWIN system in response to the FNS Administrative Notice (AN) 11-06, many of the corrections had not been done. Benefits CalWIN on-line CalFresh application still does not have all of the mandated SAWS-1 and SAWS-2 questions.

CalWIN Benefits still discriminates against the homeless. The on-line application refuses to accept applications if the applicant has no address. The homeless are the population that is in most need of an on-line application. This was not identified as concern by FNS. So there is no corrective action plan to stop the discrimination against the homeless seeking food stamps benefits.

Benefits CalWIN promised USDA, FNS, that system would meet the language requirements of 7 CFR §§ 272.4(b)& 273(c)(3) by July 11, 2011. As of August 18, 2011, over 30 days from the promised date, Benefits CalWIN continues to be in violation of the federal regulations 7 CFR 272.4(b)&273(c)(3). The system allows the applicant to select a language. When the applicant selects a language other than English, Spanish, Chinese, it informs the selector that the language selected is not available at this time. There are 18 language and only three are available at this time.

The system allows the applicant to state whether or not they want “immediate need for CalWORKs or expedited services for food stamps. However, it unlawfully limits

CalWORKs Immediate Need (CW-IN) to persons who have an emergency.

Benefits CalWIN does not solicit answers to the factors that would be needed to determine CW-IN. CalWIN and the counties intentionally included “emergency” as a requirement for CW-IN when they know that a person may have an emergency yet still not be eligible for CW-IN. For example, a 2-parent family applies for CW. The primary wage earner is self-employed and working 40 hours a week. For the past 2 months he has made no money. But he is still working at his business hoping to generate some income. The savings are exhausted and they apply for CW. They have no money. Their utilities are shut off. It is an emergency. Are they eligible for CW-IN? According to CalWIN “yes”, but according the state regulation they are not. Thus, Benefits CalWIN is misleading and cruel for it gives false hope to families in deep need.

Benefits CalWIN promised that food stamp recipients would have the ability to file an CalFresh application with just name, address and signature as mandated by 7 CFR § 273.2(c)(1) buy July 11, 2011. Benefits CalWIN applicants still cannot do so. Yet, there is no penalty against the State for not complying with its CAP.

Sadly the poor will suffer; the state and county welfare administrators will continue to get their paychecks while not keeping their promises.

CCWRO NUMBER OF THE WEEK

This year the Legislature cut welfare grants by 8% bringing down the monthly fixed income to the same level of 1984. What did welfare recipients do for the General Fund this Year? Welfare recipients contributed to the General Fund a sum of \$ 1.9 billion. The exact number is:

\$1,188,007,000

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