

CCWRO Welfare News

Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc.
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In Brief

✓ **Equal Justice?** – The HHS Office of Inspector General released “Report A-01-12-02500” finding that the State of Pennsylvania’s welfare office unlawfully claimed \$1.3 million in IV-E training funds. That is a \$1.3 million fraud committed by Pennsylvania’s welfare officials. Did anyone go to jail? No. In fact, the report “recommended” that the agency return the stolen money. We wonder what the recommendation would have been if the perpetrator was a poor welfare mom- lock her up and throw away the key.

✓ **States Carry Over TANF Money While Reducing Benefits.** During federal fiscal (FY) year 2011, States carried over \$4 billion to FY 2012 while reducing TANF grant amounts. Meanwhile, throughout many states, thousands of children experienced “government child abuse” because of inhumane low welfare grants and barbaric, punitive full-family sanctions.

✓ **States Fleece the TANF Program.** During FY 2011, only 36%, or \$11.1 billion of the Federal TANF and State-TANF MOE money, was used for “assistance”. Assistance includes expenditures for TANF means-tested families which also include administrative expenses. The remainder of the total \$30.6 billion was used for non-assistance purposes. **Low utilization of TANF monies by states in Table #1 below reveal that TANF is a program for States to fleece poor families.**

California leads the nation in the lowest participation rates in food stamps.

In December 2012, FNS released the recent national food stamp participation rates. California continues to lead the participation rates from the bottom.

Although DSS and counties have made efforts to improve participation, food insecurity is rampant in California as only 55% of the households eligible for food stamps are actually participating in the food stamp program. The fact that SSI recipients are not eligible for food stamps is a factor in this low rate, but it is not the primary factor. The primary factor for low participation rates are such major barriers as “unnecessary verification requirements” and “procedural requirements”.

California is unique in that it is administered by 58 different counties who do what they want. There is no real uniformity for verification and procedural requirements in California. Counties justify inconsistencies by their “business practice”. Yes, county flexibility may be desirable if it produces results. However, a 45% non-participation rate is clearly “failed results”.

Con’t. on page 2

TABLE #1	How States Used Total TANF Funds During FY 2011	TANF Money Used for TANF Eligible Persons “Assistance”	TANF Money Used for Non-Assistance	Total TANF Federal & State Funds Available for FY 2011	Percentage of TANF Funds Used for poor families
<i>Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services</i>	U.S. TOTAL	\$ 11,131,407,676	\$19,492,710,638	\$ 30,624,118,314	36%
	ARKANSAS	\$ 15,706,228	\$ 170,887,018	\$ 186,593,246	8%
	ILLINOIS	\$ 110,592,904	\$ 1,200,457,743	\$ 1,311,050,647	8%
	NORTH CAROLINA	\$ 75,160,984	\$ 553,496,919	\$ 628,657,903	12%
	MICHIGAN	\$ 193,973,371	\$ 1,182,656,360	\$ 1,376,629,731	14%
	GEORGIA	\$ 85,820,475	\$ 475,682,292	\$ 561,502,767	15%
	SOUTH CAROLINA	\$ 39,258,511	\$ 198,230,175	\$ 237,488,686	17%
	IDAHO	\$ 4,734,754	\$ 21,153,310	\$ 25,888,064	18%
	MARYLAND	\$ 88,468,836	\$ 366,095,921	\$ 454,564,757	19%
	TEXAS	\$ 158,860,696	\$ 651,633,512	\$ 810,494,208	20%
	CONNECTICUT	\$ 98,168,216	\$ 384,401,940	\$ 482,570,156	20%

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Con't from Page 1

After several decades of this consistent county failure it is time for the single state agency to take steps to combat non-participation in the Food Stamp Program.

The problem starts with the way food stamp expedited services is administered in California for households in urgent need of food. Verification for expedited services is very limited – only identity has to be verified. All other verification can be postponed for 30 days. Identity can be verified by getting the applicants' social security number and "G" verify the applicant for expedited service food stamp benefits.

How does "G" verify work? When the county receives the applicants' social security number (SSN) on the application for benefits, the county inputs that number into their computer system and the computer verifies that this SSN belongs to the person with the name on the application. If the applicant has been on aid previously, then their identity can be verified within minutes. If they have not been on aid previously, then the identity will be verified the next working day.

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A county worker viewing of a SSN card is not necessary and requesting a copy of the SSN card is the solicitation of unnecessary verification that causes low food stamp participation rates.

While some counties have same day filing, they do not have the same day issuance to the extent permitted by federal law. Most counties insist on verification in addition to identity and refuse to "G" verify identity through the social security number. "G" verification of identity should be the preferred method of verification of identity. It saves time in that workers do not have to take the identification document from the applicant, copy or scan

it and then return the document to the applicant. This is all time wasted that can be used to process more cases effectively and more efficiently by simply "G" verifying the identity of the applicant if possible.

Many counties prefer to verify identity through collateral contact in lieu of "G" verification or simply ask the applicant to come back when they documentary evidence. And thus, the barriers to become eligible for food stamps starts from day one.

There are other verification efficiencies that DSS can have counties use, such as using the "worker number" income verification to verify income in lieu of asking the applicant to produce check stubs that need to be copies or scanned.

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Finally, the federal regulations provide many state options. Frequently, California opts for options that erect barriers to participation.

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