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TANF Program Under Attack

[HR 2811](#) passed the House of Representatives and recalibrates the “caseload reduction credit” which lowers the way the TANF work participation rates (WPR) are calculated which could reduce the State WPR.

It does not allow States to use their maintenance of effort dollars to fund cases that are not meeting the WPR. It will also eliminate the California WINS program that helps California meet the WPR.

The bill would require States to provide statistical information about the income of TANF recipients leaving TANF:

1. Earnings and median earnings two (2) quarters after leaving TANF;
2. Earnings and median earnings four (4) quarters after leaving TANF for those who had earnings in the first two quarters; and
3. For TANF beneficiaries under 24 years of age who were subject to work requirements and in high school while on TANF whether they attain a high school degree or its equivalent within a year after leaving TANF

The bill does nothing about the barbaric and racist full-family sanctions of TANF families and children which many view as “government child abuse”. Less than 20% of TANF money is used to provide cash aid to needy TANF families and the widespread state fleecing of the TANF funds to balance their state budgets.

CAPI, CalWORKS and CalFresh Skimming Update

Skimming is now reaching new heights. It is estimated that approximately \$100 million a year is stolen from CalWORKS beneficiaries by electronic theft. This can be stopped within a 2-3 months if CDSS decides to give beneficiaries a chipped EBT card for CalWORKS and keep the current chipless EBT card for CalFresh. This means that folks would have to use two (2) different cards. 80% of CalWORKS money is skimmed while 20% is skimmed in CalFresh.

CalSAWS should have automated this replacement process back in 2020, but there has been no effort to help victims of electronic theft crimes in California. CalSAWS can program BenefitsCal to accept a completed EBT 2259 form, which is the form used by victims of electronic theft crime, and issue the replacement benefits just like banks do for ATM card thefts. But CalSAWS refuses to take the most basic action to help Californians.

California’s victims of electronic theft crimes often end up homeless, hungry or food insecure. There’s plenty of money sloshing around CalSAWS to ensure technocrats are well healed. CalSAWS, CDSS and County Welfare Departments need to act and act fast to stop the misery that individuals and children are enduring that can easily equate to “government child abuse”.

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Many WtW Participants Don't Get Transportation Costs

When GAIN and Welfare-to-Work programs were enacted, the Department of Social Services and counties testified in the Legislature that participants will have their transportation costs paid for by the WtW program. It was supposed to be one of the positive features of the mandatory CalWORKs employment program. History has shown that most WtW participants do not get transportation costs paid or are paid less than what state regulations allow.

About 10 years ago, advocates met with counties to address this issue. One solution offered by advocates was to empower WtW participants to request transportation costs on-line. That solution was rejected by counties. One county welfare director told us that transportation money comes out of the "county single allocation" which means less money for counties. Last year, counties did not spend over \$370 million. The money was returned to the State General Fund.

Before the pandemic arrived, CalSAWS agreed to include a feature in the new BenefitsCal public facing portal for CalWORKs beneficiaries to request transportation costs online. The CalSAWS contractor, Deloitte agreed to work with advocates in the design of the on-line transportation feature of BenefitsCal. When CalSAWS and Deloitte started to build the feature, they looked at the "requirement" and then had a "discovery" session to understand how the particular feature should be built. That "discovery session" was conducted, but the people who proposed this feature were excluded from the discovery process. After conducting the secret discovery which excluded the affected public, CalSAWS presented their final product.

The product they presented asked recipients to "tell us why you need transportation". Advocates suggested that this feature should instead include check boxes like most welfare forms. Does the participant need mileage? Bus pass? Other transportation related services? The suggestion for check boxes were summarily rejected by CalSAWS staff and advocates were told by CalSAWS staff take it or leave it.

The request for transportation now on BenefitsCal requires the participant to write an essay explaining why they need transportation. The box only accepts "English" language explanation. That is a violation of participant's civil rights. **TABLE # 1** reveals fiscal year 2022-2023 the percentage of participants getting transportation.

Month/Year	Unduplicated Participants	Getting Transportation	%
22-Jul	69,520	24,670	35%
22-Aug	74,116	27,705	37%
22-Sep	77,075	30,652	40%
22-Oct	79,719	32,377	41%
22-Nov	80,195	32,320	40%
22-Dec	81,038	32,412	40%
23-Jan	81,621	31,777	39%
23-Feb	80,437	31,647	39%

Source: CDSS WtW 25 and 25A reports

SOLUTION: There is a very simple solution. According to the U.S. Dept. of Transportation "[Household Spending on Transportation](#)" households in the lowest income quintile spent the least on transportation \$4,273 a year. It is also a fact that about 75% of CalWORKs families do not have a car.

Today, full-time college students receive a \$500 standard payment for schoolbooks. If the actual costs exceed \$500, they submit a request and get a payment for the rest. The same thing can be done for transportation. Participants can be issued a \$100 advance payment each month with a claim form to submit a request for transportation costs over \$100 and have the option of submitting the claim electronically.

TABLE #2 below shows county-by-county the percentage of WtW participants getting transportation. One wonders if in Orange, San Diego, San Francisco, Madera, Solano, San Joaquin, Contra Costa and Alameda county only 12% to 30% of county employees submit travel claims when they travel to various welfare-related events or work travel?

TABLE # 2 - WtW Getting Transportation During February 2023

County	Participants	Getting Transp.	%
Statewide	57518	23372	41%
Imperial	761	30	4%
Butte	380	28	7%
Ventura	579	66	11%
San Francisco	1143	132	12%
Orange	2695	319	12%
San Luis Obispo	187	23	12%
El Dorado	156	20	13%
San Diego	6013	846	14%
Madera	217	31	14%
Stanislaus	473	69	15%
Solano	880	140	16%
San Joaquin	988	159	16%
Lake	91	16	18%
Tulare	1842	340	18%
Shasta	177	33	19%
Tuolumne	63	13	21%
Merced	553	116	21%
Santa Barbara	252	58	23%
Mendocino	86	21	24%
Tehama	120	31	26%
Marin	57	16	28%
Alameda	1700	481	28%
Trinity	38	11	29%
San Mateo	134	40	30%
Contra Costa	943	289	31%
Sutter	74	23	31%

Humboldt	299	99	33%
San Benito	33	11	33%
Kings	591	202	34%
Kern	1604	575	36%
Sonoma	453	172	38%
Sacramento	3693	1466	40%
Napa	51	21	41%
Fresno	3734	1583	42%
Siskiyou	24	11	46%
Los Angeles	17820	8558	48%
Monterey	382	199	52%
Nevada	135	73	54%
Calaveras	70	41	59%
Placer	106	63	59%
Yuba	305	190	62%
Riverside	3267	2709	83%
San Bernardino	3908	3365	86%
Santa Cruz	332	664	200%
Glenn	No report for February 2023		
Santa Clara	No report for February 2023		
Yolo	No report for February 2023		

Source: CDSS WtW 25 and 25A reports

Short Staffing: A Preventable Crisis or At Least A Manageable One?

by Daphne Macklin

For anyone who seriously follows employment trends, the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) has felt like watching storms clouds gather. As someone with an ear to the ground in public meetings and settings where discussions about staffing at county welfare of-fices is on tap, the word has been short staffed, short of experienced staff and short of staff period, experienced or otherwise.

So, the basic questions are why the short staffing? How to replace staff who are quitting, retiring or choosing not to continue or seeking other careers? And then there is the never-ending question: is it something about the work?

The short staffing at county welfare offices and state administrative agencies in the wake of the PHE involves a combination of factors; an aging workforce, the confluence of new computer programs and agency protocols as new programs and job demands are presented (for some time the State of California has been moving toward the establishment of the CalSAWS single state agency computer system for the administration of major welfare benefit programs, i.e., TANF, CalFresh. This involves training and retraining staff, as well as the reorganization of services deliveries and interactivity with client communities and populations), working conditions for those facing personal health challenges, family and personal challenges, and for many – social work is simply a job they do not want to do any more.

Let's be honest, there is nothing glamorous about working in a welfare office. While someone was able to make a hit situation comedy out of say 'parks and rec', other than the occasional teacher the usual depiction of a public employee is some heroic trope first responder. Social workers if they are ever depicted, are bossy, rule followers, meddlesome types, faceless bureaucrats. Who would want that job? The workforce is not what it used to be for public employment: few politicians, especially in the present, want to be seen as supporting the welfare state, which includes welfare workers, the ultimate rule makers.

So, let me say this -- social work is a noble profession. It is generally seen in the context of other issues, not just poverty but also criminal justice as well as education and child welfare, health care, family systems and structures, as well as social and cultural forces. What is needed in this present is a little vision. Once upon a time, very much of what we now expect to be handled by public sector employees, was the all but sole province of mainly women who worked essentially as unpaid or poorly subsidized volunteers for religious organizations. Social work was once the province of idealistic young people of means. By the 1980's careers in social work related to law, medicine, education, and political science were practical career options for young college grads in search of stable regular employment who could use their language and cultural skills on behalf of language minorities, new immigrant communities and those who self-identified as elderly or disabled with unique concerns and perspectives.

In context, the "welfare state" circa 2023, is barely 100 years old. Its first workers and structural architects were women, many immigrants, who pioneered the concept of the 'settlement house' that could help new arrivals make their way without or despite falling prey to the well-known dangers of urban life: drug

use and abuse, personal degradation and exploitation. This model would evolve as new waves of immigration and as others found themselves will to focus on self-empowerment, adapted systems and structures to serve new communities and changing needs.

So, does this offer solutions to our current challenges -- understaffed welfare administrative offices? I am going to say I think so.

Let's start with the resources we have - I would focus on California's community colleges which are in the best positions to offer recruitment and training for the populations who often use welfare programs and their services. County welfare agencies can partner with community colleges to focus students on learning the skills and knowledge prospective social workers will need to help beneficiaries in their local county welfare department eg, how to deal with implicit bias, how to navigate CalSAWS and studying county and state rules, regulations and guidance so prospective social workers can start the job up to date and prepared to serve the community effectively.

The non-profit sector itself could serve as a recruitment resource and assist counties in linking with communities of prospective employees who will opt for social work as a long-term career goal as well as a steppingstone for other types of work such as teaching. In the past two decades organizations like CCWRO, Western Center on Law and Poverty, many local legal aids including LSNC, BALA, LAFLA, Legal Service of Northern California, Bet Tzedek and California Association Of Food Banks have built bridges to communicate, negotiate and effectively advocate to state and local agencies. While not always in alliance with state and local agencies, these working relationships could be leveraged to help create a system whereby the knowledge of public benefits systems these organizations have can be used to educate future social workers and foster a desire to work at county welfare offices.

A lot of what inspired this article came from the ["Fourth-year Ricky Holder will study comparative social policy at Oxford"](#) article.

(<https://news.uchicago.edu/story/uchicago-student-named-marshall-scholar-aims-reform-us-foster-care-system>.) A foster care kid now a Navy vet and in a few weeks a fellow graduate of the University of Chicago, the College. It helps to remember to do two things, first breathe, second dream.