

Deukmejian wants work-for-welfare plan like Reagan's

SACRAMENTO (AP) — Gov. George Deukmejian asked the Legislature yesterday to enact a welfare program strikingly like Gov. Ronald Reagan's plan of a decade ago, including a requirement that most able-bodied recipients work for their benefits.

The public expects recipients to "seek work as a first priority in life, rather than welfare," David Swoap, a former Reagan welfare aide who is Deukmejian's Health and Welfare secretary, said at a news conference.

Swoap said California welfare benefits are too generous and should not be increased until the state implements a work requirement and cracks down on fraud, overpayments and parents who don't pay child support.

The wide-ranging plan includes a proposal to let Deukmejian suspend numerous Medi-Cal benefits, including adult dental care, most drugs and eyeglasses, if the Medi-Cal program runs up a substantial deficit.

The overall package would save between \$21.6 million and \$40.6

million in the first year, and more in future years as the work program expanded, Swoap said. He said about two-thirds of it would require either state or federal legislation.

"This is not punitive. This is not harsh," Swoap said. "This is not something that arbitrarily denies benefits or cuts eligibility."

"But an advocate for welfare recipients had a different view.

"This is not designed to provide any kind of real jobs," said Kevin Aslanian of the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation.

"Workfare has been shown to be a wasteful makework which is costly, wasteful and an administrative nightmare," Assemblyman Tom Bates, D-Oakland, chairman of the Assembly Human Services Committee, said in a statement.

Swoap contended the Reagan workfare program produced "demonstrable savings" by making some welfare recipients work for

their checks, preparing them for other jobs, and deterring other people from applying for welfare.

But the Reagan program never came close to its goal.

Nearly 59,000 people were supposed to be placed in jobs in the first full year, but no more than 1,134 were placed, for an average of 5.6 months, the report said.

Swoap said the Deukmejian program would apply to every able-bodied welfare applicant in the state except parents of children younger than 3. About 300,000 recipients would have to look for

work, and more than 200,000 would have to work for their benefits, Swoap said.

He said they would spend half their time working at such jobs as school crossing guard, hospital aide or highway maintenance worker, and the other half looking for full-time work.

"There are a number of jobs that are going undone at the present time," Swoap said. He said Deukmejian would make sure the welfare recipients wouldn't displace current workers, but didn't say how.