



## Workfare bill to be unveiled

### Lawmakers give plan good chance

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Workfare legislation that proponents call the most sweeping welfare-reform proposal in 15 years will be introduced this week with strong bipartisan support and Gov. Deukmejian's endorsement.

If the plan is enacted, able-bodied welfare recipients would get job training and help finding work. And if they remain on welfare beyond specified time limits, they would be required to earn their benefits on public-service projects and other jobs.

Although the proposal needs a two-thirds vote of both houses to pass, legislators familiar with years of combat over the workfare issue said the measure has an excellent chance to become law this year because of the bipartisan support.

Previous workfare proposals have died or been reduced to experiments, such as the San Diego program upon which much of the new proposal is based.

The 38-page workfare bill prescribes numerous opportunities and safeguards for able-bodied welfare recipients, although they must join the program if they want welfare.

Sponsors say the program focuses on 300,000 able-bodied recipients whose children are older than 6, but they can be excused from participation for a dozen reasons.

Recipients would be required to sign contracts with their county welfare offices, outlining their job goals and responsibilities, plus what services the counties would provide them. Contract disputes would be settled by an impartial third party.

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Services would include child care for children under 12, books, tools and equipment needed for jobs or training, and transportation to and from work or school, according to a draft of the bill obtained by The Bee.

Some recipients could attend community college, and others could take vocational education. Some would have their grants diverted to employers, to subsidize their salaries while they obtain experience in the work force.

Those who fail to participate would be penalized by having the county welfare department manage their grants for three months. If their failure continues, they could be dropped from the welfare rolls for up to three months.

Those who don't find jobs during the training phases of their programs would end up working enough hours a week to "pay back" their grants at an hourly rate equal to the average starting salary in California, presently about \$5.07 an hour. They could not be hired for jobs that result in the displacement of other workers.

The breakthrough is the product of months of negotiations between Assemblyman Art Agnos, D-San Francisco, and Secretary of Health and Welfare David Swoap, who last spring conducted a joint evaluation

of workfare programs in three Eastern states.

Agnos said the Legislature's main workfare proponents, including Sen. John Garamendi, D-Walnut Grove, and Senate Minority Leader Jim Nielsen, R-Woodland, have agreed to be principal co-authors of the compromise.

Others sponsors include Assemblyman Ernest Konnyu, R-Saratoga, and Assemblywomen Lucy Killea, D-San Diego, and Gloria Molina, D-Los Angeles.

Significantly, the Deukmejian administration announced that Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, D-San Francisco, will be among those who present the proposal at a Wednesday press conference.

Senate President Pro Tem David Roberti, D-Hollywood, however, has reserved judgment on the proposal, and Sen. Diane Watson, D-Los Angeles, chairwoman of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, remains opposed.

Another opponent is Assemblyman Tom Bates, D-Oakland, chairman of the Assembly Human Services Committee, which will hear the bill first.

Bates said the bill would be costly, create an administrative nightmare and end up being repealed in a few years. There can be no reduction in welfare rolls unless there are more

jobs in the economy, he said.

Watson said the proposal would have to offer welfare recipients real work at real wages for 40 hours a week before she could consider supporting it. The proposal would produce only about 10 hours a week of meaningless work, she said.

Sen. Bill Greene, D-Los Angeles, said he is leaning toward supporting the bill. "The system needs to change to prepare people to compete in the work place," he said. "But this does not give them a job. Saying that would be a political hoax."

The Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, representing people on welfare, said the program threatens to create 300,000 more latchkey children — those who have no parent at home after school.

Furthermore, the program would take credit for finding jobs for women who would have found jobs anyway, said Kevin Aslanian, the association's legislative advocate.

Agnos, who normally sides with representatives for the poor, said their arguments against workfare no longer have intellectual substance.

Agnos predicted the program would cost \$250 million in its first full year of operation, including money transferred from present programs providing job training and child care.

Child care alone might cost be-

tween \$30 million and \$60 million more, he predicted.

Detailed cost figures are being prepared by the state Department of Social Services and will be reviewed by the legislative analyst's office before the bill is considered by the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, Agnos said.

High cost is not expected to stop the proposal, since Deukmejian and key Republicans favor the plan.

Proponents say there will be substantial savings in about three years because the welfare rolls should be reduced as workfare participants find jobs.