

Workfare Proposal Would Cost Millions Before Paying Off

By RICHARD C. PADDOCK, Times Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO—A bipartisan workfare and training proposal would cost taxpayers millions of dollars in new welfare spending but would begin saving money in three years by getting people off public aid and into jobs, state officials said Wednesday.

About 170,000 able-bodied welfare recipients, primarily mothers with children over age 6, would be required to work, receive job training or go to school under the compromise plan offered by a coalition of lawmakers and the Deukmejian Administration.

The plan, billed as the biggest overhaul of welfare in 15 years, is designed to reduce the welfare rolls by helping recipients find permanent employment.

Public Service Work

Those who are unable to find jobs would be required to perform public service work for a year or more in exchange for their welfare checks.

If the plan is approved by the Legislature, each county would have the flexibility to devise its own program, offering different kinds of work and training. The counties would have until 1990 to fully implement their programs.

The proposal was chiefly negotiated by liberal Assemblyman Art Agnos (D-San Francisco) and

Health and Welfare Secretary David Swoap, who helped present the proposal at a two-hour press conference Wednesday morning.

The plan has the support of Gov. George Deukmejian and a wide range of legislators including Assembly Speaker Willie Brown (D-San Francisco) and the GOP leaders of both houses, Sen. James W. Nielsen of Woodland and Assemblyman Pat Nolan of Glendale.

Eligible recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children would be required to participate in the program but would be able to choose among such alternatives as workfare, vocational courses or on-the-job training, Agnos said.

Not All Options Available

But not all of the options would necessarily be available in each county, according to Carl Williams, special assistant to the director of social services. And some recipients, depending on their skills and job history, would be restricted in the kind of choice they could make. For example, a person who has not had work experience might not be eligible for training for work that involves sophisticated skills.

"We are not offering everything to everybody," Williams said in an interview. "But we are offering two or three choices in every category."

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It doesn't just depend on what the recipient wants; it also depends on what their objective assessment (by a social worker) says."

More than 20% of the program participants would perform mandatory work—popularly known as workfare—on a short-term basis before entering job training or finding a job, Williams said.

As many as 15% of all participants could end up on workfare indefinitely with little likelihood of finding full-time employment, he said.

"It's possible there are some people no matter what services we offer who are functionally unable to find a job," Williams said. "They would end up doing (community work) for a long period of time."

First-Year Loss

According to Swoap, the program would result in a net loss of \$6.2 million in its first year of operation. By the third year, he said, it would show a net savings of \$20.6 million.

In total, the proposal would pump \$79 million into welfare programs during the first two years, but most of that money would be offset by recipients leaving the welfare rolls to take jobs, the Administration estimates.

By the time the program is fully operating, it would increase welfare spending by \$136.3 million but would save \$272.3 million, for a total net savings of \$136 million,

Swoap said.

Much of the increase would result from the \$63 million that would be spent on child care for welfare parents. But the program would also rely on a variety of training and educational programs now available, including community college courses.

Assembly Human Services Committee Chairman Tom Bates (D-Oakland), a longtime opponent of workfare, criticized the latest plan as "a costly program that gives no guarantees for reducing the welfare rolls or providing jobs."

Bates estimated that the plan would cost taxpayers \$136 million in its first year, far more than the Administration estimates.

Plan Opposed

Kevin Aslanian, lobbyist for the California Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations, protested that the plan is designed to steer recipients into workfare, not jobs.

The proposal "only serves a political purpose and really doesn't benefit recipients in the long run," Aslanian said.

Welfare recipients should not be required to work, he said, because they are already performing a valuable role in society by staying home to raise their children.

"The biggest obligation they have is to raise a child to be of benefit to society," he said. "They are doing a better job than most middle-class or high-class families do."