

# Bipartisan group offers plan to employ welfare recipients

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McClatchy News Service

SACRAMENTO — Thousands of able-bodied welfare recipients would be put to work for public agencies and non-profit organizations under a sweeping statewide welfare-reform proposal that state officials said Wednesday would save state and federal taxpayers as much as \$136 million a year.

At the same time, proponents of the measure said social workers will be able to help people instead of merely handing out checks and "looking under beds" for welfare cheats, while welfare clients themselves will be spared ending up in "dead-ends," warehoused by the system.

Thus did a bipartisan group of "workfare" proponents from the Assembly, the state Senate, and the Deukmejian administration describe a welfare-reform bill they plan to introduce this

week.

They called the proposal "historic," unique to the nation, and a major revamping of the existing welfare system.

Even an opponent conceded the program apparently will pass the Legislature and become law, breaking a stalemate on workfare that has lasted for years.

The opponent, Assemblyman Tom Bates, D-Oakland, chairman of the Assembly Human Services Committee, called the proposal a "Cadillac plan" designed by liberals and conservatives. "But the problem is it only gets five miles per gallon," he said.

Bates predicted the Deukmejian administration would use workfare to replace full-time state workers who are being laid off because of the governor's staff cutbacks.

Spokesmen for the Coalition of

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## Workfare

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California Welfare Rights Organizations denounced the proposal, saying the plan offers nothing more than demeaning "make-work."

On the contrary, Assemblyman Art Agnos, D-San Francisco, claimed that what used to be called "workfare" has been changed to "fair work."

Agnos, a principal architect of the bipartisan compromise, explained that welfare recipients would be working for the equivalent of \$5.07 an hour, well above the minimum wage and even more than the average starting wage in the state.

Agnos said the recipients will do "additional jobs that could be done if people were available, but that do not displace existing jobs."

That means they would work

in printing plants, the state clerical force, and water-quality laboratories, or as police auxiliaries, nurse or library aides, playground monitors, or crossing guards, among other jobs.

As many as 170,000 of the state's 600,000 adult welfare recipients would take part in the program the first year, with 60,000 or more getting jobs in the private sector, the administration predicted. On their way to getting jobs, they would be offered training programs, work-experience opportunities and schooling to help them compete in the workplace.

If the jobs they get pay less than they were getting on welfare, single parents would be subsidized while their child-care and Medi-Cal benefits continued. Two-parent families could continue to be subsidized only for about three months because of federal law.