

# Welfare officials object to changes in 'workfare' bill

By Ron Roach

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SACRAMENTO — Despite protests from the Deukmejian administration, an urgency bill to extend San Diego County's workfare program has broken through a legislative bottleneck.

A 5-0 vote of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee yesterday moved the Assembly-passed bill by Assemblywoman Lucy Killea, D-San Diego, to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The bill would extend job-search and work requirements for welfare applicants for two years beyond the scheduled June 30 expiration of the three-year-old program.

Sen. Diane Watson, D-Los Angeles, chairwoman of the committee and a foe of mandatory work-for-welfare, abstained on the bill after adding amendments which caused Gov. Deukmejian's Department of Social Services to oppose the bill.

One amendment would require continued payment of welfare benefits to applicants pending resolution of disputes over participation in workfare. Another requires restoration of benefits to those who change their minds and participate.

Both amendments would require a waiver of federal regulations, without which the state would have to pick up the costs, estimated by the state Department of Finance at \$2 million to \$3 million a year.

"We very much support the San Diego extension," Steve Bailey, deputy social services director, told the committee. "Unfortunately, the amendments taken today raise concern that the state will take on liability."

"We don't think the amendments improved the bill," he said. "The way the bill is amended, the department does not support the bill."

Killea said she would seek amendments in the Appropriations Committee which would restore the Assembly-approved protection against

loss of federal funds.

"It's moving along and we'll work it out," Killea said.

The \$5.8 million program requires most able-bodied welfare applicants, including mothers with children aged 6 or older, to seek and take jobs.

The extension is needed to allow the county to continue requiring that some participants take community jobs for up to 13 weeks. The bill was amended to require, effective Sept. 1, that participants be paid the prevailing wage for the job.

Currently, participants work a maximum of 32 hours a week at the \$3.35 hourly minimum wage, to qualify for a welfare check, as stipulated by federal regulations. The bill would require adjustment of hours, not an increase in actual pay, so participants receive credit for more hours worked.

"You will go after waivers and not cut people off pending those waivers," Watson said.

Watson said welfare applicants should not be paid less than other employees for the same work.

The bill also was amended, at the behest of organized labor, to protect the positions of union members.

Earlier this year, the county prompted introduction of bills in the Senate and Assembly, with the agreement that the Killea bill would be the primary measure.

Yesterday, according to Watson, Killea's bill became the only vehicle, because Tom Bates, D-Oakland, chairman of the Assembly Human Services Committee, told her his panel will not hold a hearing on the parallel bill by Sen. Wadie Deddeh, D-Bonita, should it pass the Senate.

Welfare rights advocates, including Kevin Aslanian, lobbyist for the Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations, urged adoption of the Watson amendments, but still described the San Diego program as fundamentally flawed and urged its termination.

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