

Praised and Criticized

S.D. Trial Paved Way for New Workfare Law

By DANIEL WEINTRAUB and KENNETH F. BUNTING,
Times Staff Writers

California's new work-for-welfare program will be tailored more to the needs of individual recipients and provide better job training than the San Diego County experiment that was a model for the statewide plan, county social service officials say.

But welfare rights representatives, who have spent years fighting to scrap or change San Diego's pilot project, say the "workfare" legislation signed Thursday by Gov. George Deukmejian will do little more than punish welfare recipients by making them perform dead-end jobs in exchange for their benefits.

San Diego officials hope to have their new workfare plan ready to go for as many as 12,000 of the county's 34,000 welfare families by July, 1986. That should put San Diego well ahead of the state's 57 other counties, which will have two to three more years to put them in place.

The goals of the San Diego model and the statewide plan are the same: to reduce the welfare rolls either by helping people find jobs or cutting benefits to those who re-

fuse to work. Both programs are aimed at the same population: able-bodied recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) who have no children under the age of 6.

Both also have as a key element the public service jobs—from mowing lawns at county parks to typing letters in government offices—that have become synonymous with workfare, even though the programs include much more.

But the similarities end there. The San Diego experiment, although revolutionary when it began in 1982, was a bare-bones approach compared to the elaborate plan fashioned after years of negotiations among the state's most conservative and liberal politicians.

The final compromise was hammered out after midnight on the last day of this year's legislative session. Because it places no limits on the length of time welfare recipients can be forced to work, the state plan is seen by some as more punitive than the San Diego model. But because it also includes

Please see **WORKFARE, Page 3**

WORKFARE: S.D. Trial Paved the Way for Law

Continued from Page 1

a wider choice of programs to complement the public service jobs, it is seen by others as more humane.

Here is a step-by-step explanation of how the statewide workfare plan is supposed to operate and a comparison with the San Diego model:

- The state's program, known formally as Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN), begins with an evaluation of welfare recipients' education and English language skills. Clients who have not graduated from high school or who cannot speak English are directed to remedial education classes. San Diego had no such feature.

- At the next step in GAIN, recipients are divided into three groups depending on the length of time they've been on welfare and their past contacts with the labor market.

Clients who have not had a job in two years are sent to a mandatory one-week "job club," where they are taught through counseling and video tapes how to conduct themselves in job interviews. After the job club, these clients spend up to two weeks using phones to inquire about openings.

Welfare recipients who have held jobs within two years are allowed to skip the job club and search for work for up to three weeks on their own. Clients who are considered long-term welfare cases do not look for work immediately but instead move on to training, education or public service programs.

In the San Diego project, all

participants were treated the same without regard to their past work experience or length of stay on welfare.

- Once the job search is completed, clients who fail to find work under the state program will undergo extensive assessments to determine their aptitudes and preferences for work. Then they will sign contracts with social workers, with the client promising to fulfill certain requirements and the county agreeing to provide services, including payment for child care and transportation costs.

Recipients will then be asked to choose from several training and educational programs, including up to two years of higher education if they are already in college. Only if they do not choose these programs will they be assigned to the public service jobs that formed the heart of San Diego's workfare. If a client and counselor do not agree on the best form of training or work, the client can appeal the decision through an arbitration process.

The San Diego model did not assess clients' aptitudes, did not include contracts and required all participants not finding jobs to perform public service work for up to 13 weeks. The most recent form of San Diego's program exempted students taking as many as nine units of college work.

- After short-term training or public service work, clients in the state program will have another 90 days to search for work. At that point, those who do not find jobs will be placed in a one-year workfare job.

- Finally, in what may be the

most significant change from the San Diego model, clients who remain unemployed even after a year in workfare will be reassessed and sent through the program again. In San Diego, once welfare recipients completed 13 weeks in workfare, they were essentially discharged and returned to the welfare rolls with no further obligation to the county.

It is this aspect of the state workfare legislation that has drawn the most protests from welfare rights organizations.

"The biggest problem I see with it is that it goes on forever and ever," said Colleen Fahey Fearn, an attorney with the Legal Aid Society of San Diego. "There is no question there are some people who probably get a lot out of a workfare program. The problem is it's not a training program. So for those people who have no work experience, no education, are recently divorced, are very young, to put them in a job that is just going to teach them entry-level skills and is not family supporting, I say it trains people to get welfare-cycle jobs."

In other words, Fearn asserts, the single mothers who make up the vast majority of welfare cases may be able to get jobs through workfare, but they won't earn enough money to support their family and will eventually return to welfare.

Kevin Aslanian, legislative advocate in Sacramento for the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, said he would prefer

to keep the San Diego model that he and others have worked for three years to perfect. Aslanian and other critics of workfare were particularly pleased by changes required of San Diego as part of the Legislature's extension of the program just as it was about to expire in July.

"We still don't like it, but the San Diego program is a jewel" compared to the statewide workfare plan, Aslanian said. "The GAIN program never lets the government off your back."

But others argue that the state's program is more humane than San Diego County's project.

"There is a much greater work training, vocational training and educational component in the new program as opposed to our bill," said Assemblywoman Lucy Killea (D-San Diego), author of the legislation extending the San Diego project. "The whole concept is that if circumstances permit it, they are permitted to have some say in the kind of job they'd like, what kind of training they would like."

And county welfare officials, who have spent the past three years defending their project as humane and effective, have quickly endorsed the state program as potentially much better than their own.

"Overall, the state program is more individualized," said Joan Zinsler, head of the county's workfare division. "In our program, everyone does the same thing so we never really looked at what the individual needs were."