

Judge bars welfare pay delay

SACRAMENTO (AP) — In a defeat for Gov. Deukmejian, a federal judge ruled Friday that new state rules delaying eligibility for welfare violated federal law.

The rules, which took effect April 1, can remain in place for 10 days while the Deukmejian administration decides whether to appeal and seek a longer stay, said U.S. District Judge Raul Ramirez.

Deukmejian ordered the change last July, effective Oct. 1, saying it would save the state \$14.5 million through June 30. But because of court rulings, they have been in effect a total of about two months.

The governor's Social Services Department could not say how much Friday's ruling would cost the state or whether it would be appealed.

The rules cover the date at which a new welfare applicant is paid benefits.

Under the former system, an applicant who was found eligible for welfare was paid benefits retroactive to the date of application, if it was in the same month as the finding of eligibility; if not, the benefits started the first day of the following month.

Under Deukmejian's plan, benefits were paid only from the time the applicant actually was found eligible. If the applicant had met all the requirements for eligibility in the previous month, however, aid would be paid from the first of the next month.

For example, a mother who applied for welfare on April 20, registered for work as required on May 2, and was found eligible on June 3 would get benefits retroactive to May 1 under the old rules and June 1 under the new rules ordered by Deukmejian.

But Ramirez said the state rules were more restrictive than federal law, which requires benefits to start no later than 30 days after the date of application. Using the same dates, the mother would get benefits starting May 20, or 30 days after she had applied for welfare, under the federal rules.

Kevin Aslanian, spokesman for the California Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations, said in a statement that the state regulations "deny needy families and their children funds to buy food, pay their rent and meet their other basic survival needs."

Because Ramirez's decision was not in writing, it was not clear Friday whether he had ordered reinstatement of the former state rules or adoption of the federal rules, which are more stringent than the old state rules but less stringent than Deukmejian's rules.

Bakersfield Californian