

APPEAL-DEMOCRAT

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State takes slice out of welfare

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Appeal-Democrat

Yuba-Sutter welfare recipients face the prospects of payment cuts if Gov. Pete Wilson signs a \$58.7 million state budget as expected.

The proposed budget, already passed by the state Senate and Assembly, would shave \$14 off the average welfare payment to low-income mothers and their children, senior citizens, the blind and disabled. Average payments for a family of three would be trimmed from \$607 to \$593 a month.

The cuts would especially be felt in Yuba County, where a recent state report said nearly 17 percent of county residents rely on welfare. As of December, about 10,600 Yuba County residents received Aid to Families with Dependent Children and nearly 13,000 collected food stamps.

In Sutter County, about 5,400 people — or 7.5 percent — receive public assistance. Colusa County has 5.5 percent of its residents receiving welfare benefits.

About 41,000 people in Yuba, Sutter, Colusa and Butte counties receive welfare or Aid for Families with Dependent Children.

The proposed cuts concern area social service agencies and welfare rights advocates who say a third consecutive year of cuts will make living more difficult for those on public assistance.

"What people are confronted with today is (the state) is trying to make people live on a prehistoric income," said Ben Jackson, director of the Rural Opportunity Resource Center in Marysville.

WELFARE: AFDC cuts

From A1

Ed Fischer, interim assistant director of human services for Sutter County, said the reduced payments will still cover basic needs but that the cuts will adversely affect those on public assistance.

"When you're down to basic needs, it's hard to find ways to adjust," he said.

Fischer said that he expected more money to go into food stamp programs to offset the cuts scheduled to hit Aid for Families with Dependent Children. But he said the cumulative effect of welfare cuts over the past few years will place an added burden on families who receive aid.

"As costs continue to go up and grants go down, it's going to make it more difficult," he said.

This would be the third consecutive cut in state welfare payments, Fischer said. The budget, if signed, will go into effect Sept. 1.

Kevin Aslanian of the Sacramento-based Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations said the cuts don't address the state's unemployment problems.

"This just distracts attention from this state's real problems: jobs, jobs and jobs," he said.

Jackson said after rent, child care, food and clothing costs, families on public assistance are hard-pressed to make ends meet. He said cuts in payments mean necessities won't be met.

"We're seeing people who can't meet their basic needs," he said.

Aslanian painted a grim picture of what he said welfare cuts would mean, calling the proposed action "penny-wise and pound-foolish."

"It's punishing women (on assistance) for having children," he said. "This means more kids will go hungry, more people are going to become homeless," he said. "All of these cuts will have long-term effects."