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SB 1041 Successfully Increases WtW Non-Compliance & Sanctions

In 2013, DSS implemented SB 1041 that among other things, require breast feeding moms to participate in the WtW program components of job club or work experience. The parents could be exempt, but they would have to request an exemption, which is not easy when call-center phones ring and go unanswered. 29 counties have call-centers, another major barrier between the caseworker and the beneficiary. When messages are returned, if they are, they come as “no caller ID/blocked” and beneficiaries do not answer the call because they fear that it is another solicitor. During 2017 an estimated 35,000 families with babies under 2 years, were sanctioned by the California Welfare-to-Sanction program also known as Welfare-to-Work.

During the SB 1041 deliberations, CCWRO predicted that SB 1041 would simply increase the severe poverty in the CalWORKs program through increased sanctions. CalWORKs families receive an average fixed cash assistance well below 50% of the federal poverty level. When WtW sanctions the family, the family lives an average fixed income at around 21% of the federal poverty level. TABLE # 1 below reveals the increase in the number of CalWORKs families found to be non-compliant and the increase in the number of them found to have no good cause, which means sanction – severe deep poverty.

Telephonic Processing of Applications and Recertifications Cause “CalFresh Churning”

Many counties throughout the state are doing CalFresh applications and annual redeterminations telephonically in order to reduce welfare administrative costs. County policy makers design policies that are suitable for the county with little or no consideration of how the policy impacts the beneficiaries of public benefits program.

During the application or annual redetermination process, many counties tell the individual that they will get a call on a certain day between 8 am – 12 noon, or 10 am - 11 am or 1 pm - 3 pm, depending on the county. In setting the time, there is no consideration that the applicant/recipient may be working or maybe has to get the kids to school or pick them up from school during the county designated time zone. The applicant or the recipient is told that the county will call, but they do not mention that the call will be coming from a blocked number.

These kinds of policies are the major cause of CalFresh “churning”. It’s no wonder that California leads the nation in low SNAP participation and has one of the highest administrative costs in the nation.

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TABLE # 1-Number of Families Sanctioned

Year-July	Total Undupl	Monthly Noncomp.	Monthly % of Noncomp.	Monthly Good Cause	Monthly NO Good Cause Cases that results in Sanctions	% of no Good Cause Each Month	Annualized Total Families Sanctioned
2012	99837	24927	25%	14200	10727	43%	128,724
2013	100237	25073	25%	14200	10873	43%	130,476
2014	111757	27397	25%	16512	10885	40%	130,620
2015	108783	29899	27%	17162	12737	43%	152,844
2016	86355	23809	28%	9783	14026	59%	168,312

(from page 2)

WHAT IS A GOOD, HUMANE POLICY? First of all, why are counties blocking their telephone numbers? These are taxpayer funded telephone numbers, not the workers' personal telephone numbers. Counties should not call with blocked numbers when the call is coming from a publicly funded telephone number.

Counties should offer several time slots, just like counties do when they want to set up a meeting, such as, a "doodle" appointment setter. The same should be done for beneficiaries of public benefits.

STATE HEARING ABANDONMENTS- This is also a problem for telephonic state hearings. Hearings are scheduled for a certain date and time period and folks get a call from a blocked number. Many believe the blocked call is another irritating call trying to sell something and they do not answer. Then DSS calls the hearing "abandoned". CDSS SHD should stop blocking their telephone numbers so claimants will know who is calling.

County Wants to Use the Work of a Sanctioned Family to Meet the County Federal WRP

"We have a question about a case that is on the E2Lite list. We cannot find an ACL that specifically addresses this issue. Below are the details:

Case Background:

- Client failed to disclose his job to CalWORKs Employment Specialist.
- This undisclosed job actually meets WPR (client worked many hours).
- Case went into sanction because the Employment Specialist did not know about the job and case was eventually closed.
- Case has since been included in the E2Lite sample and a different worker discovered this job.

Question: Can we now count these hours to allow this case to meet WPR? If so, what would be the best way to move forward given that the hours were not claimed in the system? Can we back-date an employment plan?"

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How nice. The person is working and meeting the WPR and rather than removing the sanction all the county wants to know is how can they use the sanctioned persons hours to meet the county WPR. This is not an aberration. In 2012, DSS admitted that in one month there were over 3000 persons sanctioned meeting the WPR. In 2017 we found out that in a given month, over 5,000 families who met the federal WPR were still being sanctioned. Thus, every month there are thousands of CalWORKs recipients meeting the federal WPR and still being sanctioned.

California Sanctions for Failure to Meet the Federal WPR, goes down by 99%

According to DSS, the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) penalized California for failing to meet the overall WPR in each federal fiscal year from 2008 through 2014, and for the two-parent family from 2012 through 2015. As a result of successful implementation of statewide strategies in cooperation with our county partners, the initial penalty exposure of \$1.8 billion has been substantially reduced through corrective compliance. Nominally, the current penalties for 2014 and 2015 are \$296 million and \$66 million respectively. However, methodological inferences, based on recent correspondence from OFA, suggest that these amounts may be further reduced to less than \$5 million in 2014 and \$13 million in 2015.

Interesting, how government sanctions can evaporate while sanctions against CalWORKs and CalFresh recipients, often illegally, take affect within a month or so and just go on and on – meeting the apparent real purpose of the program – to punish the poor for being poor.

While CalWORKs recipients, who allegedly fail to participate are sanctioned for months, the State of California has yet to be sanctioned for refusal to meet the federal WPR in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. The \$1.8 billion has gone down to \$18 million.

We ask if there is any way families who endure deep poverty could get similar compassionate treatment from California's public benefits administrators and the democratically controlled Legislature when it comes to CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work sanctions?