



CCWRO Welfare News

Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, Inc.
1111 Howe Ave., Suite 150 • Sacramento, CA 95825-8551
Telephone (916) 736-0616 • Cell (916) 712-0071 • Fax (916) 736-2645

<http://www.ccwro.org>

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Travel Reimbursements: WtW Participant v. County IHSS Worker

CDSS statistical reports regularly show that less than 50% of CalWORKs recipients participating in Welfare to Work activities receive payments for travel expenses. Counties regularly violate Welfare and Institutions Code § 11323.2(a)(2) by not paying transportation costs. Recipients use up to \$100 from their average \$511 monthly benefit for a family of three (3) to subsidize their Welfare to Work (WtW) activities. The counties do not provide information to recipients about the availability of transportation reimbursements or a method for reimbursing transportation expenses.

Meanwhile, CDSS IHSS Training Academy scheduled trainings in Sacramento, Los Angeles, Riverside and Monterey. As part of the registration process, county IHSS workers attending a training are provided a travel claim form on line to complete and submit 15-days in advance. Most IHSS workers receive a salary that is more than 500% more than the average CalWORKs monthly benefit.

Some WtW Participants Not Allowed to Volunteer to Work for Pay

The RAND Study released November of 2016 reveals that 35% of counties operating the SB 74 Expanded Subsidized Employment Program prevented WtW participants from volunteering for this program. There is no statutory or state guidance allowing the counties to deny CalWORKs recipients requests to volunteer for ESE slot.

The report also reveals that 71% of the counties cited lack of jobs as a major barrier and 79% of counties said that explaining the complex SB 1041 process to participants was a major hindrance to implementing the provisions of SB 1041.

RAND REPORT

Counties Are Not Allowing WtW Participants to Exercise SB 1041 for Flexibility

In 2014 the California Legislature enacted SB 1041 into law. The purpose of SB 1041 was to give CalWORKs participants a choice of activities that would include core or noncore activities.

Non exempt CalWORKs recipients with children were required to participate in an employment activity. A single parent with child under 6 had to participate in WtW for 20 hours a week; a single parent with a child over 6 had to participate in WtW for 30 hours a week and two-parent families had to participate in WtW for 35 hours a week. The 20-30-35 hours are federally required hours. The employment activities that meet the federal definition of work activity are known "core" activities. Activities authorized by state law, but not by federal law are known "non-core" activities. "Core" activities include one year of vocational education; 21-day job search and then unlimited work experience, which means a parent works for no pay to get their cash aid benefits. "Non-core" activities are mental health and substance abuse treatment sessions and vocational education, past the first twelve months.

During the SB 1041 implementation workgroup meetings advocates were concerned that counties would not allow CalWORKs recipients to choose their own WtW activity as envisioned by SB 1041. CCWRO suggested that participants be given a list of activities that they can select, take that list home and mail it back to the county. Both DSS and counties objected to allowing CalWORKs recipient to make a choice and said that workers are indeed offering CalWORKs recipients choices. During this same time, fewer WtW participants were enrolling in college.

The RAND study reveals that advocates continued assertion that counties are not affording WtW participants choices of choosing noncore activities in the first 24-months was not an illusion, but a reality, according to the report:

(cont'd from pg1)

“Administrators and caseworkers in half of the focal counties suggested that SB 1041, vis-à-vis participant choice, disincentives engagement in federally approved activities. Caseworkers reported being discouraged in some instances from counseling participants to choose noncore activities because it was detrimental to meeting the CalWORKs federal WPR. Caseworkers in one county said, “We are being held accountable for their [participants’] choices . . . so [we] try to encourage them to do things that meet WPR.” Given the cost of participant flexibility, some counties feel compelled to limit participants’ freedoms for the sake of the CalWORKs federal WPR.” RAND report pp. 119-120.

Counties Are Concerned with Consequences of Not Meeting the Federal Work Participation Rates

During the site visits by RAND researchers, county administrative and caseworker staff in five out of the six counties expressed serious concerns over the possibility of state and county-level sanctions for not meeting the CalWORKs federal WPR. However, trepidation over the potential negative impact of not meeting WPR extends beyond state and county-level penalties. Administrators and caseworkers in the six counties felt that they were subject to consequences for falling short on the CalWORKs federal work requirements. One focus group shared that, in addition to the county sanctions, caseworkers are penalized in the form of Corrective Action Plans when their cases don’t meet WPR. Caseworkers in another county discussed indirect effects of county noncompliance with WPR, including possible job loss if the county was sanctioned. Embarrassment for not meeting WPR during audits was another negative outcome cited by caseworkers in one of the counties. Another county’s caseworkers affirmed this sentiment by noting that caseworkers feel like they are failing if they do not meet their performance standards. Administrators in another county commented that two consequences experienced by caseworkers include increased workload to assist participants with meeting WPR requirements, and poor performance reviews if they fail to do so.

Counties View SB 1041 Being a Major Impediment to County’s Ability to Meet the WPR

One of the most common concerns voiced by county staff was the tension they felt between supporting clients’ participation in SB 1041 while feeling pressure

to meet the WPR. Administrators in five of the six counties felt that the incentives or rules of SB 1041 conflicted with the goal of meeting WPR and that SB 1041 directly contributed to a low WPR.

One county administrator commented that SB 1041 takes them further away from meeting WPR. When asked about the impact of this legislation on WPR, one county caseworker responded, “It’s a detriment to state and federal WPR numbers.” Administrators, caseworkers, and service providers in the counties cited an apparent conflict between the WPR requirements and SB 1041 (WtW) requirements.

All staff across the focal counties argued that WPR and SB 1041 differ in terms of philosophy, types of approved activities or exemptions, and the level of flexibility offered to participants. In addition, administrators and caseworkers in all six counties stated that incongruence between the CalWORKs federal and SB 1041 policies contribute to staff confusion and high workload.

The primary recommendation offered by most of the counties was alignment of the CalWORKs federal and SB 1041 requirements. Administrators in one county asked, “When is the state going to go back to the table and see if they can align [SB 1041 requirements] with the Feds?” An administrator in another county said, “If I had one wish, I wish everything was synced up . . .” Caseworkers in the same county said, “We should mirror what the federal does [to meet the WPR].” In sum, while many counties recognize the benefits that SB 1041 affords CalWORKs participants, fear of not meeting WPR appears to outweigh the perceived advantages of SB 1041.

Philosophical Differences: WPR-Work-First v. SB 1041-Job Ready

The WPR requirements are heavily work focused with limited opportunity for participants to engage in nonwork-related activities. Conversely, SB 1041 emphasizes the importance of mitigating the impact of potential barriers to employment through a variety of supportive services and options to participate in non-job-related activities.

Administrators and caseworkers reported challenges reconciling these work-first versus work-ready philosophies. Some characterize the work-first approach as doing what is best to meet WPR, while the work-ready strategy as doing what is best for participants.

Caseworkers in one county highlighted this point by saying, “you either help the participant or take the hit

[on their performance for not meeting WPR].” Out of concern for the WPR, caseworkers in three focal counties indicated that they strongly encourage CalWORKs participants to engage in activities that meet the CalWORKs federal requirements. However, five out of six focal counties suggest that the work-ready activities offered under SB 1041 (e.g., education) may offer better opportunities for achieving self-sufficiency; thus are in the best interest of the participants.

Balancing the competing values of WPR and SB 1041 is an ongoing struggle for the counties.”

Do Segregated Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs Work?

Manpower Demonstration Research Center (MDRC) has published pro-workfare studies since 1974.

On October 2016, MDRC published a report entitled “Job Search or Basic Education Participation First”. This report published the findings of three groups of Riverside County CalWORKs recipients: (1) those who receive no WtW services; (2) job club and job search mandatory participants; and (3) mandatory participation in basic education instead of job club and job search.

The results show that after 15 years of spending up to \$30 billion on employment services, there was no significant earning differences between the groups of participants. See Table # 1.

TABLE # 1 –Average Annual Earnings in Riverside County		
No WtW participation requirements	Mandatory job club and job search	Mandatory participation in basic education
\$8,949	\$8,864	\$9,268

The study’s findings support that “education” results in higher wages than job club/job given the fact that 65% of the CalWORKs recipients do not have a GED. Moreover, does spending over \$2 billion a year on California’s segregated Welfare-to-Work program to yield an additional \$119 a month make sense?

RAND Alleges 10% of WtW Participants are Sanctioned

The Rand Study states that ten percent of the WtW participants are sanctioned. The RAND Study may be right for a given month, but when you look at the sanction statistics cumulatively, it is a whole different picture. Rand noted that “Yearly snapshots since SB 1041 show that, in a given month, fewer than one out of ten participants were currently sanctioned.” The percentage of WtW participants who receive at least one sanction during their first two years in the program remained steady at about 14 percent from the 2007 to 2013, according to the RAND report. The RAND calculation uses all CalWORKs families and not just families who were actually participating in a WtW activity. Under State Law counties can only sanction CalWORKs recipients who fail or refuse to participate in a WtW activity. Thus, only unduplicated participants are sanctioned.

In reality, between 20% and 27% have been sanctioned according to the CDSS WtW 25 reports, looking at the number of unduplicated participants who were sanctioned. The RAND report ignores the total number of CalWORKs families enduring deep poverty that ravages families of California each and every month in the real world.

January	Unduplicated Participants	Sanctioned	Sanctioned
2000	190,502	33,571	15%
2001	181,473	28,410	14%
2002	184,134	35,891	16%
2003	149,723	44,847	23%
2004	121,807	46,030	27%
2005	110,504	42,046	28%
2006	104,170	38,504	27%
2007	111,022	35,107	24%
2008	120,685	32,461	21%
2009	138,240	34,315	20%
2010	141,806	35,273	20%
2011	138,960	33,834	20%
2012	119,810	33,148	22%
2013	116,010	36,124	24%
2014	117,845	41,225	26%
2015	119,396	43,609	27%
2016	111,930	40,537	27%