



# CCWRO Welfare News-2021-03

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## In Brief

**CalWORKs Caseload Decreases With High Unemployment** - Most counties are either closed to the public or open on a very limited basis. Applicants cannot contact the county welfare departments to get basic assistance with their applications. Thus, 60% of applications are being denied for families in need not because they are not eligible, but because they cannot navigate the CalWORKs application path. Another reason that caseloads are decreasing is the inability to complete annual recertification.

**Caseload goes down – County Single Allocation goes up** -The 2020-2021 budget projected that the CalWORKs caseload would be 587,000 cases with the counties being allocated \$2,348,000,000 for the 587,000 cases. Even with Covid-19 and the record job losses, the actual caseload for 2020-2021 was 405,317 cases, much lower than the budget projection. This is a 32% difference between the estimated and actual caseload. As such, the counties were overpaid by \$750 million. There are no repayment plans. In fact, while the 2021-2022 budget denies families living in deep poverty a full COLA based on California's necessities index, it projects that the 2021-2022 caseload would be 482,436 cases and increases the county single allocation to \$2,390,000.

**Partial CalWORKs Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2021-2022** - The 2021-2022 budget proposes to give CalWORKs families a 1.5% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in lieu of the actual California Necessities Index (CNI) COLA of 3.72% for 2021-2022. The budget also discloses that about \$2 billion will be diverted from the CalWORKs program as a "contribution to the general fund" for non-CalWORKs costs.

## Website Redesign Survey

CCWRO is redesigning our website and would like your input, please fill out this brief survey by clicking [here](#).

## Discrimination in CalWORKs/CalFresh

The Journal of Health Psychology "[What Does Discrimination Look Like](#)" was on the agenda of the California Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1 on Health & Human Services March 17, 2021 hearing – page 42.

The article, analyzes six of the examples of discrimination that are applicable to beneficiaries of safety net programs operated by California's 58 counties, which by law operate under the supervision of CDSS but counties often create *de facto* policies through their own actions.

1. Beneficiaries of safety net programs are treated with less courtesy and respect than other people.
2. County welfare workers act as if beneficiaries of safety net programs are not smart.
3. County welfare administrators and workers act as if they are afraid of program participants, both applicants and recipients of safety net programs assistance.
4. Welfare agency staff treat all applicants and beneficiaries of safety net programs as if they are all dishonest.
5. County welfare administrators and staff act as if they are personally or morally superior to the client population who use safety net programs.
6. Beneficiaries of safety net programs are threatened or harassed by county welfare administrators and workers.

As the single state agency, CDSS should address these systemic problems. The following is how CDSS described to the budget committee how they will address these equity issues:

(cont'd on page 2)

(cont'd from page 1 Cal WORKS)

*1. Foster a culture of diversity and inclusion that actively invites the contribution and participation of all people and is representative of the varied identities and differences (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, tribe, caste, socio-economic status, thinking, and communication styles) in California.*

**TODAY'S PRACTICE:** CDSS does not "invite ...all people" for contribution and participation in its policy development. As a practice, CDSS first meets with county people and after they decide what the policy should be, they may invite others who will not have any idea what alternatives were considered and accepted or rejected in developing the policy. There is an IEVS workgroup that meet regularly and advocates are expressly excluded, even after being asked to be allowed to contribute and participate. CalSAWS has a whole host of meetings with CDSS and county staff in which advocates are excluded.

*2. Devise statistical reports that make inequities visible.*

**TODAY'S PRACTICE:** To date, we have only seen one document about racial equity that was a statewide report. We have not seen any county-by-county racial information that reveal inequities in many of the counties negative and positive actions, such as application denial and approval, imposition of sanctions and penalties, fraud referrals and investigations, etc.

*3. Advance equity through training, tools, and technical assistance.*

**TODAY'S PRACTICE:** Inequity is caused by state and county policies that are "subjective". Training, technical assistance and tools cannot do away with inequities caused by subjective policies. The remedy is to have objective policies that assure no racial inequity. For example, denial of applications vary from county to county, worker to worker. But once a family of 3 in Region 1 is found to be eligible and has no income, they will receive a payment of \$878 no matter which county they are in or who the worker is. Why? Because \$878 is an objective number and there is no room for inequity.

*4. Improve language access and access for communities with disabilities.*

**TODAY'S PRACTICE:** There are some positive steps being undertaken by CDSS in this arena. We are hopeful for an equitable outcome. Stay tuned.

*5. Support on-going partnerships with those commu-*

*nities most affected by inequities to advance equitable policy and systems changes.*

**TODAY'S PRACTICE:** CDSS has a wonderful partnership with counties, but no equitable partnership with the beneficiary and advocacy community. The module partnership was the CalOAR engagement that was done equitably where all parties, beneficiaries, advocates and counties were at the table from "a" to "z". CDSS should adopt that as a module for all partnership engagement and not the divided progress that is generally used by CDSS staff.

**CalWORKs program equity** - The March 17, 2021 Assembly Budget committee's Health and Human Services committee analysis set forth standards for equity. Now let us analyze how each of the six equity issues set forth above apply to beneficiaries of California's safety net programs.

### **1. Beneficiaries of safety net programs are not treated with courtesy and respect.**

If you are a beneficiary of California's safety net programs and go to a bank, you are treated like a customer, while at the county welfare department, beneficiaries are often treated like an annoyance.

Consider the use of "call centers". A person seeking information about a problem with CalFresh or CalWORKs may find themselves on hold for extended periods of time. After the call is answered it is often dropped mid-call or after an attempt to transfer the call to another agent. This leaves the caller deeply frustrated and unserved by a system that is supposed to be "more efficient and accessible". CDSS, the principal administering agency for California's safety net programs has yet to establish uniform call-center minimum standards for appropriate levels of customer.

### **2. County welfare workers act as if they think beneficiaries of safety net programs are not smart.**

The paternalistic nature of California's safety net programs makes most beneficiaries of California's safety net programs feel like they are less than other people, second-class citizens or worse. Most of the subjective rules are based on the assumption that CalWORKs beneficiaries need help understanding basic information. This is reflected in the WtW mandatory participation requirement that is based on the assumption that CalWORKs beneficiaries do not want to work and the only way to get them to want to work is by imposing the WtW sanctions, which is in reality what the WtW is all about -sanctions. A

classic example is a recent conversation with a county welfare administrator about a bill that repeals the current rule that self-employed WtW participants must earn minimum wage if they want to continue with their self-employment activity. The county welfare department advocate stated that welfare administrators are concerned that the individual may fail and then will time out, thus, they should be required to show that they are making minimum wage or be sanctioned if they keep working at their self-employment and refuse to participate in the WtW job search or workfare job – which is work without pay for the county. The WtW program operated by counties do not guarantee that the parent will not time out without having a job that pays a family wage.

### **3. County welfare administrators and workers act as if they are afraid of program participants, both applicants and recipients of safety net programs assistance.**

In Los Angeles, in order to even enter the welfare office, beneficiaries of California's safety net programs are forced to undergo a personal search procedure. This does not happen when people go to DMV, banks, stores and most places of service. When beneficiaries of California's safety net programs enter the welfare office, armed police officers or guards, frequently treat them as if they are a suspect criminal class of people.

### **4. County welfare administrators and staff act as if they are personally or morally superior to the client population who use safety net programs.**

The CalWORKs and CalFresh verification process screams out that the County welfare administrators and workers simply do not trust just about anything that beneficiaries of safety net programs state - even under penalty of perjury. Applicants are asked to get a statement from a former employer going back nine (9) months stating that the individual no longer works there. If a beneficiary of safety net programs gets a cash payment for work and reports that on the income report, aid is terminated for failure to provide verification of the earned cash reported to the county. Finally, many beneficiaries of safety net programs are unlawfully required to file monthly reports to the WtW program. What types of reports, specifically?

Under California CalWORKs and CalFresh programs most counties operate the Early Welfare Fraud Detection program. Under this program, all applicants and beneficiaries of safety net programs are presumed to be dishonest and just about any applicant or beneficiary of safety net programs can be investigated for FRAUD.

### **5. County welfare administrators and staff act as if they are personally or morally superior to the client population who use safety net programs.**

County welfare administrators and workers have publicly asserted that applicants and beneficiaries of safety net programs cannot be trusted and must be monitored like criminals. As a result, many applicants and beneficiaries of safety net programs feel like criminals when dealing with the county administrators and workers. The current system allows for any applicant to be subject to a welfare fraud investigation, even where no act of fraud has been committed. Just entering the welfare office in many counties, you see a sheriff with a gun. That sets the tone of experience at the welfare office and that applicants and beneficiaries are so dangerous, that they need law enforcement to control "those people".

### **6. Beneficiaries of safety net programs are threatened or harassed by county welfare administrators and workers.**

It is not uncommon for a welfare worker to refer an applicant and beneficiary of safety net programs to welfare fraud after requesting a state hearing. The right to request a hearing is an applicant or recipient's legitimate, constitutional due process right. Compare the numbers of welfare fraud workers employed by counties for CalWORKs and CalFresh to the fraud investigators for the federal and state government for tax fraud, medical billing fraud, debt collection fraud, fake charities, mortgage fraud, prize and lottery fraud, procurement fraud, workers' compensation fraud.

Some workers use requests for unnecessary verification as a way to discriminate against applicants and beneficiaries of safety net programs. Workers are able to do this because the "verification rules" are very subjective and CDSS refuses to make these rules objective to stop discrimination.

## CalSAWS, CDSS & DHCS Mislead the California State Legislature

CDSS and DHCS maintain that CalSAWS can't expend resources to automate new statutory or regulatory changes not required for migration of C-IV, LRS, and CalWIN to CalSAWS. Keep in mind that CalWIN's migration to CalSAWS won't be completed until October 2023.

On February 19, 2021, CalSAWS stated that automation needed to implement newly enacted laws creates the risk that the "volume of changes to baseline code may cause degradation in quality and increase in defects." This is referenced as Risk #204. In other words, CalSAWS does not want to timely implement new legislation, including legislation favorable to beneficiaries of California's tattered safety net. Further, some favorable legislation does not need to be computerized. It only requires the county to modify its business practices.

A CalSAWS system change request (SCR) CA\_219227, asked for approval to use 10,000 hours to migrate "C-IV schedule" and "on request report to LRS". This raised a question that most of the 200 reports were already in LRS according to Stanislaus County. CalSAWS responded that this request is only for 35 reports that may have been in LRS, but are now inactive. The review of "[CA-219227][Analytics] Release F Reports Re-Platform" document shows that the System Change Report (SCR) will modify 74 reports and not 35.

Why can't CalSAWS activate the inactivated reports in LRS? Are all of these "reports" imperative? That's 10,000 hours for CalSAWS. Imagine how many new laws could be implemented with 10,000 hours. Are these reports more important than providing medical assistance to the elderly and disabled or aiding needy children who are homeless?

CA-220988 – This LRS System Change Request will use 1,385 hours for Los Angeles Department of Social Services and Los Angeles Department Children & Family Services to provide responses to "Consortia queries". This is for CalHEERS.

CA-220989 – This LRS SCR will use 1,385 hours so Los Angeles Department of Social Services and Los Angeles Department Children & Family Services can provide responses to "Consortia queries" This is **not** for CalHEERS.

CA-220991 – This LRS SCR will use 1,385 hours so Los Angeles Department of Social Services and Los Angeles Department Children & Family Services can provide responses to "Consortia queries" This is for "On-Line".

CA-220992 – This LRS SCR will use 2,720 hours so Los Angeles Department of Social Services and Los Angeles Department Children & Family Services can provide responses to "Consortia queries" This is for "Client correspondence".

CA-220993 – This LRS SCR will use 1,385 hours so Los Angeles Department of Social Services and Los Angeles Department Children & Family Services can provide responses to "Consortia queries" This is for "Eligibility"

One may wonder what this is all about? 1,385 hours each for CA-220988, CA-220989, CA-220991, CA-220993 and 2,720 hours for CA-220992 all for the same thing. Last year, we asked CalSAWS Director John Boule to provide a link for SCR on the summary page showing the 1,385 hours calculation as well as the client 2,720 correspondence hours. Why do taxpayers have to pay for 8,260 hours or \$536,900 just so LADPSS and LADCFS can respond to queries when CalSAWS actually charges CDSS and DHCS for each query.

CIV-108107 – This is a 420 hour job to remove Sprint 7 features from C-IV which is soon going to be migrating to LRS. Why can't this wait until the migration which is right around the corner?

CA 204582 – 309 hours to add edit functionality to a service arrangement. What is so imperative and necessary to have edit functionality. It is nice. But would it house or feed beneficiaries of the California safety net programs?

CA-517409 – 3,626 hours – Build a C-IV customer lobby management system. The lobbies are mostly closed in C-IV counties that would opt to use this system. Isn't this part of migration?

CA -201377 – 3,905 hours – GA/GR solutions for C-IV counties that are migrating to LRS. CDSS/DHCS/CalSAWS told the Legislature if they improve the safety net program, that may need automation and CalSAWS just does not have the capacity do so. But, they need 3,905 hours for some unknown GA/GR solution which is being done as C-IV is disappearing.

These are just examples of CalSAWS changes that are being implemented while CalSAWS sheds crocodile tears that they are not able to automate changes in law to help California's needy population that California's tattered safety net is designed to serve

### **San Bernardino County Refuses to Offer Homeless Assistance to a Pregnant Mom**

On March 17<sup>th</sup> Ms. 2953307 of San Bernardino County went into the Rancho Cucamonga TAD branch to drop off documents related to her CalWORKs application. Ms. 2953307 was already homeless and staying on her mother's couch at this time. Her mother was about to be evicted and Ms. 2953307 had a copy of that eviction notice with her, but she was not offered any services related to her homelessness by San Bernardino County TAD. Instead a security guard in front of the welfare office door let her know she could get homeless assistance. After leaving it to the security guard to provide services to this homeless, pregnant mother of one, San Bernardino County TAD worker told Ms. 2953307 that she could not apply for homeless assistance until she was "on the street", and told her to wait until March 29<sup>th</sup> to apply for homeless assistance, two weeks in which San Bernardino

County TAD could have helped Ms. 2953307 and her family find stable living quarters but instead chose to do nothing at all.

Sadly, this story gets worse. On March 29<sup>th</sup> Ms. 2953307, complying with the incorrect direction of San Bernardino County TAD, tried to turn in her homeless assistance application and was told she could not even apply for the assistance because she had just received the \$600 Golden State Stimulus, which should not be counted as CalWORKs resources per CDSS materials.

**"These payments do not impact your CalWORKs or CalFresh eligibility or monthly benefits!"** <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/golden-state-grant-program>

CDSS even added an exclamation point to make it clear. Twice, San Bernardino County TAD refused to accept Ms. 2953307 homeless assistance application. By state law and regulation, San Bernardino County TAD is mandated to immediately accept Ms. 2953307 homeless assistance application and not count stimulus payments as resources for CalWORKs. How many other San Bernardino County recipients or applicants are being denied for this same reason? How many families are being made homeless right now because San Bernardino County is just refusing to help families in need?