



# CCWRO Welfare News-2021-10

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## WELFARE FRAUD WASTE UNVEILED

During the pandemic lock down, California wasted an estimated \$288 million on welfare fraud investigations. Counties conducted thousands of investigations to identify CalFresh households receiving excess benefits during this period in order to reduce or discontinue benefits. Table #1 shows that the current subjective eligibility worker fraud referral system resulted in unwarranted investigations.

Way over 50% of the cases referred for a welfare fraud investigation not only showed no fraud at all, but did not even show an overissuance.

Year /Quarter	Investigations concluded during the quarter with <b>NO</b> evidence found to reduce or discontinue benefits	Investigations concluded during the quarter with evidence found to reduce or discontinue benefits	Percentage of investigations that found no overissuances
2020 - 4th quarter	6149	3388	64%
2021-1st quarter	8003	3360	70%
2021 – 2nd quarter	7971	3668	68%

Source:  
 CDSS DSS  
 466 Reports

## CalSAWS Update

In September, 39 counties migrated to CalSAWS. Advocates have been telling state officials for several years that CalSAWS needs to provide effective CalSAWS training for the workers before they go live. Advocates urged CalSAWS to adopt a “certification” process verified by a third party assuring the worker is able to navigate the system effectively.

CalSAWS rejected our recommendation outright and insisted that the web-based training was sufficient. After going live, CalSAWS discovered that not all welfare workers are proficient using the system. County workers are having issues using CalSAWS that must be addressed.

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## COUNTY VICTIM OF THE MONTH

Ms. BE12302 is living in poverty. She can only eat because she is receiving CalFresh benefits. Her social security disability income is about \$1,500, which means she has a long history of work and is now disabled. She has a huge share of cost and her house payment is about \$1,200. She was getting CalFresh. On November 2021 her CalFresh benefits stopped. No notice. Nothing. In October, according to Ms. BE12302, "...a couple of big men" appeared at her house, unannounced, demanding to talk to her. They identified themselves as fraud investigators. Being aware of her 5<sup>th</sup> amendment rights, she refused to talk to the fraud investigators. In November her CalFresh benefits were stopped on the ORDERS of the Sacramento County welfare fraud investigators for failure to cooperate with the welfare fraud investigators. Apparently the 5<sup>th</sup> amendment of the U.S. Constitution does not apply to Ms. BE12302, a CalFresh beneficiary in Sacramento County. She never received a Notice of Action – CalFresh just stopped - period. An advocate contacted Sacramento County with Ms. BE12302 on the line and confirmed that her CalFresh benefits were stopped without a due process Notice of Action. Why the CalWIN computer system, which costs taxpayers 100's of millions of dollars, would allow entitlement benefits to stop without a Goldberg v. Kelly Notice of Action is mind boggling. Thankfully, Sacramento County agreed to rescind the theft of Ms. BE12302's CalFresh benefits. Her benefits were back on her EBT card on November 11, 2021. She can now eat.

## BENEFITSCAL IMPEDES CALIFORNIA APPLICATION ASSISTERS

CalSAWS has gone live with their new BenefitsCal portal which works in the 39 former C-IV counties. The new portal is operated by CalSAWS and not counties. All benefits assisters must register with BenefitsCal. When the person registers, they must indicate the county of their residence. If the county of residence is LA County or a CalWIN county, the individual cannot complete the registration even though the assisted person being helped resides in a CalSAWS county. If the individual says they live in a C-IV county and identifies a false zip code, then the request will become a

"external agency task" and some secret person in that made-up county will process the task. However, CalSAWS refuses to provide advocates with a list of these contact persons.

### CalSAWS Refuses to Release Trouble Tickets

With the introduction of CalSAWS in 39 counties, unexpected technical issues encountered by workers or beneficiaries have been occurring. When this happens, a trouble ticket is created to describe the problem and is tracked with the help desk analyst or help desk manager. According to CalSAWS the Help Desk Ticket Analysts are responsible for reviewing and analyzing trouble tickets for CalSAWS core system, Regional Call Centers, Self Service Portal/Mobile app, Imaging, Lobby Management, IVR, etc.

In addition, the analysts review and analyze tickets submitted for both level 1 and level 2 help desk support which varies county to county. Full technical support to managed counties includes project management of the local network infrastructure, workstations and printers down to the county level.

Non-managed county support includes technical support to the network point of presence at the county's data center and triage of all trouble-tickets related to the systems supported by the project. Once tickets are triaged and determined to be a valid issue, the tickets move into level 3 help desk support which is managed by the system integrator vendor. In addition, analysts perform ticket trend analysis, monitoring system performance for compliance with service level agreements, and communicating with end users surrounding the remediation of trouble tickets and system performance issues.

CCWRO has publicly asked CalSAWS for copies of the trouble tickets so that advocates have knowledge of the problems that counties and beneficiaries experience. CalSAWS Director, Boule, refuses to make the trouble tickets public because the tickets "may" include confidential information. CalSAWS other excuse is that the trouble tickets are work product. CCWRO contends that computer system problems that result in low-income beneficiaries of public

benefits, not receiving the right amount of benefits as mandated by federal and state laws and regulations, is a matter of public right and public interest.

## Beneficiaries On the Ground Report

- Ms. BC34397 received a Notice of Action from Sacramento County on the state approved NOA CF 377.4 Disc. (6/13) CalFresh Notice of Termination which said: "Effective 10/31/21, your CalFresh benefits are terminated because: Your net nonexempt income exceeds the CalFresh net income limits." The NOA did not provide the amount of the net nonexempt income. The NOA also did not identify the CalFresh net income limit.

- Ms. B1QW781's family is homeless in Los Angeles County. She applied for homeless assistance and received 7 days of homeless assistance on Wednesday, October 6th. She has four minors, 3, 6, 7 and 8 years of age. LA DPSS gave her housing search forms and told her that she would have to give the welfare office proof that she used the payment for shelter. When she went on LADPSS's YBN system, there was nowhere to upload the homeless assistance verification. There is a drop down that mentions income, identification, etc. but no "other" that allows individuals to upload documents for CalWORKs homeless assistance.

On October 13, 2021, she was in a panic because her second 7-day payment had not arrived. She called the LADPSS call center 6 times and each time the system was busy and terminated the call.

On October 13, 2021, she followed the suggestion of her advocate and used the "identification" dropdown to upload the homeless assistance documents and that was received by LADPSS. It's unfortunate that one needs to "lie" to get a document to the county.

Why does California force the homeless to turn in verification during the pandemic? Why does the law still force a homeless family of 5 with little ones, to contact the welfare office every 3 or 7 days to get their homeless assistance?

- Ms. S.W. is a working CalWORKs parent. On August 4, 2021, her current employer received a request for verification of income stating "With reference to the above named, we are informed this subject is or was in your employee. There is a matter currently pending in this

office concerning this subject, and we appreciate you furnishing us with the following from your records. You may be assured this information will be kept in confidence." This letter was signed by a worker at San Mateo County Welfare Office."

The San Mateo County worker should have known that this letter violated the confidentiality of Ms. S.W. The employer now knows that an individual working for this employer is a "welfare recipient". The form used is C-137(Re.3.00) SIU Employment Verification.

## USDA, FNS CalFresh Monitoring Report

FNS released its 2021 Management Evaluation Report for the State of California. The review was conducted of two counties: Los Angeles and San Diego. FNS conducted the Los Angeles Department of Public Social Services review in May 2021 and in San Diego in June 2021. The Management Evaluation Report confirms many of the concerns voiced by advocates, including:

- Los Angeles County is not allowing CalFresh applicants to file a CalFresh application the same day as mandated by federal regulation 7 CFR 273.2(c)(iii). This blatant violation of this federal regulation began in March 2020 and may have finally stopped last month.

- Los Angeles County conducts CalFresh interviews outside the building in public. Although the welfare offices front doors are open, LADPSS refuses to allow applicants and beneficiaries to enter the building. This is a violation of 7 CFR § 273.(e)(1).

- Los Angeles County does not record the correct application filing date received after business hours if submitted on a Friday or Saturday. Los Angeles County currently operates using extended office hours on Saturdays. If someone calls and files an application by phone, their application date is Saturday. If the application is by mail, drop boxes or on-line, an application filed on Saturday is deemed to be filed the following Monday and not Saturday. Since the County has extended hours for Saturdays, Saturday would

be considered the filing date for any application received after hours on a Friday or on a Saturday per 7 CFR §273.2(iii).

- In violation of 7 CFR § 272.4(b)(3)(i) Los Angeles fails to provide federally mandated information relative to their modified services, including providing applications and other information in languages other than English and Spanish.
- The LADPSS has a policy of returning calls within 3 days. FNS suggested a shorter period of time.
- "Observation #3: CDSS Form CW 2200 Verification Notice is unclear and vague. FNS addressed this observation to the CDSS and not the counties. The language in CW 2200 is "We will not deny or end your benefits as long as you try to get the proof and tell us if you are having problems." This Notice fails to inform the recipient that the county is required to assist applicant in obtaining documents.

## **\$50 Monthly Broadband Credit Now Available**

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) upgrade to its life-line program for low and fixed income households is a COVID-19 point of light that deserves to be used by as many people as possible. The benefit, if a household is approved, is a \$50.00 per month credit for broadband access. The current FCC lifeline service is less than \$10.00 per month.

According to an LA Times article published September 29, 2021 only about 730,000 eligible California household's have applied for and been approved for the generous benefit which is higher for qualifying users who live on tribal lands. However, per Sunne Wright McPeak, a former state agency head and Chief Executive at the California Emerging Technology Fund, as many as 3 million California moderate, low and limited income families including seniors and the disabled, may qualify for this benefit.

The basic EBB (Emergency Broadband Benefit Program) eligibility rules qualify households or individuals who meet any of these criteria:

- Household income of \$17,400 or less for individuals; \$35,800 or less for a family of 4;
- Eligibility for at least one federal safety net

program, i.e. SSI, CalFresh, Medi-Cal or a tribal assistance program;

- Eligibility for and receipt of a Pell grant for School Year (SY) 2021 - 2022, or qualification for a free or reduced price school means for SY 2019, SY 2020 or SY 2021; or
- Eligibility for an internet service provider's discounted broadband rate.

Eligible applicants should apply to their local internet provider services or on-line for the EBB program. The grant is available for only one service line per household.

Program funding is expected to last through May 2022.

EBB is directed at families with school-aged children and low-income students whose lack of internet access during the height of the COVID-19 health emergency became a hallmark of disruptions to educational programs. As the responses to the public health emergency pushed increasing numbers of people to access vital services including medical treatment, counseling and even religious services on-line, the truly brutal dimensions of the Digital Divide emerged, neighborhood by neighborhood, in stark relief.

EBB, which is expected to continue in a somewhat reduced form later in 2022, is one response to COVID-19 that may result in a beneficial permanent change.

For more information contact your local public library, your local internet service provider or <https://www.usac.org/about/emergency-broadband-benefit-program/>

See also <https://www.latimes.com/business/technology/story/2021-09-29/big-discounts-for-broadband-do-you-qualify>