

State hopes GAIN will cut welfare rolls

By Gary Richards
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Cheryl Acles wants off welfare. The Santa Clara County Department of Social Services wants her off welfare. But there is her child to think of.

"I'd love to be working again," Acles said, "but what's going to happen to my little boy?"

Acles is an unemployed single mother with a 4-year-old son. Many other single parents were among the 40 people at a hearing this week on the state's latest proposed method of reducing the 1.6 million people receiving help from AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children).

The proposal is GAIN — Greater Avenues for Independence. This legislation offers AFDC recipients a chance to obtain work and get off welfare. A variety of employment, training and education opportunities for up to two years will be offered for free. Free child care will be provided during the training process and for the first three months of work.

But single mothers at Wednesday's hearing voiced concern that the child care problem is so great that they had their doubts as to whether GAIN will make any gains in getting them off welfare.

Acles, for example, prefers to work part-time but GAIN requires full-time work.

"Child care costs a fortune," she said, "plus I want to be home with my son whenever I can."

Most single mothers at the hearing said day care would cost them at least \$3 an hour. "I can't find a baby sitter within reason," said a 30-year-old San Jose woman who asked not to be identified. "And I only have one child. If I had two or three, day care could run me a couple of hundred dollars a month."

Hilda Granado, director of the Welfare Recipients League, called "GAIN a real pain."

"We're not totally against the program," Granado said, "but in this county it often takes two parents working to support a family. Is a single mother going to be able to make it? What kind of jobs are some of these people going to get?"

"What we need is (subsidized) child care for a longer time. Then maybe some people will get off (welfare)."

Those comments came as no

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State is banking on GAIN to slash its welfare burden

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surprise to John Oppenheim, the employment and training programs administrator for the county Department of Social Services. "We all felt that child care would be the overriding issue," he said. "There was no question about it."

The problem is the high cost of child care in Santa Clara County coupled with the wages welfare recipients may earn even after they've landed a job through GAIN. Oppenheim knows the figures don't always add up.

"Entry level jobs pay about \$5 an hour," he said. "If you take home \$650 a month and your child care is \$200 to \$300 a month, you can't make it without welfare."

"GAIN is just a start for us in attempting to deal

with the day-care problem. It's not the solution, just a start at working toward a solution."

The bill requires counties to establish their own GAIN programs. Oppenheim said Santa Clara County could have an operational program by mid-summer.

All AFDC recipients with children over 6 are required to register. Those with kids under 6 may also join.

Oppenheim said he expects 2,000 to 3,000 AFDC recipients to be active in GAIN. "That would mean 4,000 to 6,000 kids involved in child care," he said.

AFDC program costs the state \$3.8 billion a year, with \$1.9 billion coming from the federal government, \$1.7 billion from the state and \$200 million from the counties. A mother and two children on AFDC get an average of \$587 a month.