CWDA
Advancing Human Services
for the Welfare of *All* Californians

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February 23 2017

To: The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula
          Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

          Honorable Members
          Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

RE: FUND ONLINE CALWORKS APPRAISAL TOOL REBUILD AND INTEGRATION IN SAWS

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) respectfully requests your consideration and support for our proposed trailer bill language (TBL) and funding to integrate the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) as a service within the SAWS, which is the system of record for CalWORKS in California, as part of the 2017-18 budget. Currently, OCAT is a standalone system that requires county staff to do duplicate data entry, and the lack of integration with SAWS impedes outcome tracking.

Over the past year, the SAWS worked with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the Office of Systems Integration (OSI), and CWDA to evaluate costs and options for OCAT-SAWS integration. These efforts were complicated when the OCAT vendor claimed that intellectual property rights to OCAT required a license to integrate it into the SAWS system. However, the OCAT vendor has also expressed significant concerns about their ability to interface the OCAT system with the SAWS. The OCAT database does not appear to adhere to standard database design parameters, which makes interfacing a significant challenge, and likely impossible without changing the database.

This makes a rebuild of OCAT, using a standard database design, the only option that will support integration into the SAWS case management system. Integration in this manner will provide a single OCAT service that can interface with SAWS to share data, eliminating the need for duplicative entry, which creates the risk of data entry errors, as well as challenges with keeping data synchronized between systems. Rebuilding OCAT as a SAWS service also lays the groundwork to track CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work program outcomes over time. Without this necessary first step, counties will never be able to provide the Legislature with comprehensive data about the efficacy of OCAT, nor can we use the OCAT data to help identify needs and plan for necessary services at the local level.

The CDSS and OSI had previously selected one of the SAWS to rebuild OCAT as a service. We were surprised to see that the January budget did not fund this effort, and instead indicated a multi-year contract extension with the existing vendor. This only defers this necessary change, since it will not address the challenges outlined above. This will also force county staff to continue to perform duplicate data entry for at least the next several years, which is inefficient and compounds the amount of data that may need to be corrected and/or synchronized when integration does occur. It also increases the total costs over time, since IT costs tend to increase in out years, and further delays efforts to link OCAT and SAWS data to track Welfare to Work outcomes. We understand the state has determined a competitive procurement is necessary for this work, which also makes it important to move forward expeditiously in 2017-18 on the process to rebuild and integrate OCAT with the SAWS.

The full cost to rebuild and integrate OCAT cannot be known until the procurement is completed. Based on estimates gathered in OSI's earlier research, we anticipate it will be in the range of $8 to $12 million in total costs for an effort that is likely to stretch over two fiscal years, although competition may result in lower costs. CWDA is committed to working closely with the Legislature and Administration to develop more refined estimates. For the budget year, restoration of the $3.7 million previously budgeted for integration should be sufficient to support the procurement and begin the work. While these costs are significant, they are only likely to increase by deferring integration, as IT costs tend to increase over time.

CWDA is also proposing TBL to codify the requirement to integrate OCAT with SAWS. The TBL would require:

o   The CDSS to obtain any necessary licenses from the existing vendor that are required to address their intellection property claim and allow the rebuild of OCAT as a service in SAWS.
o   An interface be established between OCAT and SAWS to prevent the need for duplicate data entry, and support the ability to transmit OCAT results to SAWS to support CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work case management and outcome reporting.

The integration of OCAT with SAWS will enable counties to realize the full potential of OCAT data in providing effective services to assist CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work participants, and to provide the Legislature with comprehensive data about OCAT's efficacy. It is important to codify the approach to making these changes to ensure consistent and successful support for this work into the future. A copy of our proposed TBL is attached.

We urge you to include funding in the 2017-18 budget to rebuild and integrate OCAT with the SAWS and thank you for your consideration of this important language.

Attachment: CWDA Trailer Bill Language – Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool

cc: Gail Gronert, Office of the Assembly Speaker
        Chris Woods, Office of the Assembly Speaker
        Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
        Cyndi Hillery, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
        Marla Cowan, Office of Assembly Member Joaquin Arambula
        Mark Newton, Legislative Analyst's Office
        Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst's Office
        Michael Wilkening, Health and Human Services Agency
        Marko Mijic, Health and Human Services Agency
        Will Lightbourne, California Department of Social Services
        Robert Smith, California Department of Social Services
        Kären Dickerson, California Department of Social Services
        Kristen Shelton, HHS, Department of Finance
        Jay Kapoor, HHS, Department of Finance
        Farrah McDaid-Ting, California State Association of Counties
        County Caucus