



CWDA

March 27, 2006

To: The Honorable Hector De La Torre
Chairman, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members, Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

**RE: Item 0530: Information Technology – FUND CRITICAL
EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT AND USER SUPPORT**

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) urges you to provide additional funds for two information technology projects in the *2006-07 Budget Act*. The Administration's proposed budget seriously underfunds two key components of these critical projects. First, the budget fails to fund computer replacements for either the CalWIN system or the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). Second, it fails to provide adequate help desk staff to support CalWIN county eligibility staff.

County social services staff rely on automation to perform their daily tasks. Front-line staff in the 18 CalWIN counties use computers to accurately determine eligibility for CalWORKs, Food Stamps and Medi-Cal. County employment and training staff rely on computers to help CalWORKs clients find and keep employment. Child Welfare Services staff in all counties use computers to record essential case information, prepare court documents and assist them in serving the needs of vulnerable children. To meet program objectives, these staff need equipment that operates properly and prompt assistance with their questions. When staff must wait for an answer to a question or lose time while their computers are being repaired, clients are not served. This means that Food Stamps are not issued timely or accurately, CalWORKs grants are determined late or incorrectly, child care benefits are not provided and children are placed at a greater risk of harm.

Counties' requests for periodic replacement of outdated workstations and adequate help desk support are consistent with best practice standards in information technology. The Gartner Group, a nationally recognized independent information technology expert, recommends replacing computer workstations every three to five years. After that time, machines begin to fail – leaving staff without the tools they need to assist families. CalWIN's request for replacement workstations and the CWS/CMS project's planned equipment replacement are well within Gartner's recommended replacement protocol. Counties' requests for help desk staff are actually *below* recommendations made by

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independent consultants – and the budget proposes to cut the funding for this activity even further. These costs are an integral part of the overall computer system on-going maintenance and operational costs, and should be funded in the annual budget.

Failure to proceed with recommended workstation replacements and adequate help desk support means that counties and the state will be at risk of noncompliance with federal and state program standards and performance objectives. Underfunding these items in CalWIN may lead to increased Food Stamp errors, an inability to meet Medi-Cal performance objectives and failure to meet federally required participation rates in the CalWORKs program. Likewise, CWS/CMS computer failures will thwart county efforts to improve performance outcome measures in the child welfare services program.

For all of these reasons, we respectfully request that the Legislature fund technology equipment replacement as a part of computer project budgets and specifically augment the Administration's 2006-07 budget proposal to add \$13.5 million (\$4.5 million General Fund) to the CalWIN budget and \$5.9 million (\$2.9 million General Fund) to the CWS/CMS Maintenance and Operations budget to fund needed help desk support and planned equipment replacement in the budget year.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

cc: Christian Griffith, Consultant, Assembly Budget Committee
Gail Gronert, Office of The Honorable Fabian Nunez
Julianne Huerta, Consultant, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Terri Delgadillo, Health and Human Services Agency
Scott Carney, Health and Human Services Agency
Ana Matosantos, Health and Human Services Agency
Cliff Allenby, Director, Department of Social Services
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