



CWDA

March 19, 2007

To: The Honorable Patty Berg, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members, Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

**Re: 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 *2007-08 Budget Act*. The Administration's proposed budget fails to fund hardware replacements for the CWS/CMS, CalWIN, C-IV, and LEADER statewide automation systems. In addition, we are concerned that the Administration will again seriously underfund help desk staff to support CalWIN county eligibility staff.

County social services staff rely on automation to perform their daily tasks. Front-line staff 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 use computers to investigate child abuse, 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 abuse.

Counties' requests for periodic replacement of outdated computer equipment (workstations, printers, servers, and other related equipment) and adequate help desk support are consistent with best practice standards in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 and putting statewide automated systems at risk of failure. The CalWIN, C-IV, and LEADER requests for replacement hardware and the CWS/CMS project's planned equipment replacement are all within Gartner's recommended replacement protocol.

Beginning in 2006/07, the Administration set new policy eliminating local equipment replacement funding from the statewide system budgets and funded county CalWIN help desk staff well *below* recommendations made by independent consultants. The Legislature disagreed with both proposals. Full funding was restored for both only to be vetoed by the Governor.

The Administration's proposed 2007/08 budget again excludes funding for equipment replacement and includes only place holder funding levels for the CalWIN project. We are concerned that the Administration will again underfund critical help desk support in 2007/08. Equipment replacement and help desk staffing are integral parts 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, C-IV and LEADER 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 \$27.8 million (\$11.3 million General Fund) to the budget:

	<u>General Fund</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
CWS/CMS	\$2.6M	\$5.4M
LEADER	\$2.8M	\$7.1M
CalWIN	\$4.0M	\$10.5M
C-IV	\$1.9M	\$4.8M

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

cc: Nicole Vazquez, Consultant, Assembly Budget Committee
Gail Gronert, Office of The Honorable Fabian Nunez
Julianne Huerta, Consultant, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Scott Carney, Health and Human Services Agency
Ann Boynton, Health and Human Services Agency
Ana Matosantos, Office of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
Cliff Allenby, Director, Department of Social Services
Sue Bost, Department of Finance
Kathy Curtis, Legislative Analyst's Office
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