



March 12, 2007

To: The Honorable Elaine Alquist
Chairman, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members, Budget Subcommittee No. 3

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

**RE: Child Welfare Services Workload and Budgeting –
MAINTAIN EXISTING FUNDING COMMITMENTS AND
IMPLEMENT NEW BUDGETING METHODOLOGY**

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) urges your committee to maintain existing funding commitments in the child welfare services (CWS) program. This includes \$91.4 million total funds (\$48.8 million GF) for workload relief, \$97.5 million total funds (\$61.3 million GF) for CWS Outcome Improvements, and \$16 million (\$12.7 million GF) for CWS County System Improvement Activities. CWDA also urges your committee to implement the new budgeting methodology consistent with the optimal standards recommended by the SB 2030 study.

High caseloads and increasing workload demands have resulted in an overburdened child welfare workforce. The SB 2030 Child Welfare Workload Study mandated by the Legislature found that caseloads were roughly *double* the recommended minimum standards necessary to deliver effective services to children and families served in child welfare programs. Since that study, workload demands have increased due to new, often unfunded state mandates, regulations and court decisions. Child welfare workers also face increasing challenges in working with children and families due to increased drug use, poverty, family violence and family dysfunction.

Increasingly concerned that high caseloads for social worker staff have detrimental impacts to children and families served by child welfare, the Legislature and Governor augmented the CWS budget to temporarily address workload relief. Meanwhile, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) was directed to develop an updated budget methodology and submit its report by February 1, 2007. As part of this process, CDSS consulted with the University of California at Davis, Center for Public Policy Research, to conduct an independent review of research including other state caseload standards. As expected, the research showed that California's caseloads are higher than most other states, and it found the SB 2030 study to be the most extensive and highly regarded effort to date to measure appropriate workload in child welfare.

Importantly, based on extensive review of research, UC Davis confirmed that caseloads matter—in fact, reducing caseloads has a direct and positive impact on improving outcomes for children and families. The research affirms what many have believed—high workloads for child welfare staff threatens the ability of local child welfare agencies to achieve the outcomes we all desire and that state and

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federal law require—safety, permanency and well-being for children and families. Child welfare staff, working with courts, community agencies and caregivers, are vital to ensuring that children remain safe from harm and their families receive needed services. Children who come to the attention of child protective services system due to abuse and neglect cannot receive the services they and their families need without caring and attentive child welfare staff who have enough time to work effectively with families.

CWDA urges adoption of the SB 2030 Task Force recommendations to reduce child welfare workload. This can be accomplished through a phased-in approach beginning in 2007-08, through incremental adjustments, until the optimal budgeting standard is achieved in 2011-12. CWDA stands ready to work with your subcommittee to develop an appropriate plan that ensures consistency with state efforts to improve outcomes for children and families.

Thank you for your efforts to ensure strategic and needed investment to improve outcomes for children and families served by the child welfare services system.

cc: Honorable Karen Bass, California State Assembly
Eileen Cubanski, Consultant, Senate Budget Committee
Diane Cummins, Office of The Honorable Don Perata
Chantele Denny, Consultant, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
Scott Carney, Health and Human Services Agency
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