



April 16, 2014

TO: The Honorable Ellen Corbett, Chair
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

RE: Child Welfare Services-New System (Issue 402)

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) supports the Finance Letter submitted by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) requesting funding and positions for development and implementation of the Child Welfare Services-New System (CWS-NS) project and requests your consideration of a requirement that CDSS provide monthly updates on the status of the project. CWS-NS is the replacement system for the 20-year-old Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS). The CWS-NS is a critically needed tool to enable counties to effectively serve children in and at-risk of being in the Child Welfare system. We have strong concerns that the positions requested in the Finance Letter are limited-term positions. There is now a 19-month delay in the completion date of the project due to the inability to recruit and retain qualified staff into the previously-authorized limited-term positions. Monthly updates will help ensure that there are no further unforeseen delays in the project.

The current CWS/CMS automation system is woefully inadequate and behind in changes in Child Welfare practice. Functionality has slipped over the years to a level that currently meets less than a quarter of the need. It does not provide county staff with the essential information needed to accurately assess the risk facing a child in an abusive or neglectful family. It does not support workers in the community working with families and children in their homes, schools, and community organizations. It does not facilitate critical interaction between disciplines essential to providing comprehensive cohesive family services that are most likely to create the best outcomes for children and families. It provides the barest of support for the state's Adoptions Program. Without these supports, counties cannot effectively fulfill their mandated responsibility to protect vulnerable children.

The Legislature and counties expressed serious concerns in 2011 about the realignment of Child Welfare Services to counties at the same time that the Administration discontinued the CWS/Web project, which was the project underway at the time to replace the outdated CWS/CMS system. Under 2011 Realignment, counties have been given all of the fiscal responsibility and risk for Child Welfare without there being adequate automation tools in place to enable them to serve children and families in need. At that time the Administration assured the Legislature that its action to discontinue the CWS/Web project did not represent a lack of commitment to provide counties

with essential functionality and promised to examine the options for replacing the lagging CWS/CMS automation system. The result of that examination was the recommendation of a “Buy/Build” strategy that would cost less in the long term, while ensuring continual progress toward a new system, with the replacement system, CWS-NS, to be in place by August 2017.

Concurrent with the submission of this Finance Letter, CDSS notified CWDA and counties that the schedule has now slipped 19 months and has a new completion date of March 2019. The primary reason for the schedule slippage is the inability to recruit and retain the right staff into limited-term positions. We have worked closely with the project during this year and have directly experienced the significant difficulty caused by limited-term positions. The pool of candidates for temporary positions is limited and many of the positions that have been filled have turned over within a few months as skilled staff take permanent jobs.

The Administration has requested seven, five-year limited term positions for the CWS-NS project. While we continue to question the ability of limited-term positions to enable CDSS to attract or retain the right cadre of skilled staff to effectively shepherd this effort, we acknowledge that the Administration believes the five-year term of the positions is sufficient and we agree that additional resources are needed now to keep the project moving. However, to ensure that the five-year limited-term positions are enabling CDSS to obtain sufficient staff and that the project remains on schedule, CWDA requests that the Legislature require monthly updates on the status of the project be provided to legislative staff, counties, and stakeholders. The Child Welfare Services program cannot afford future delays.

Thank you for your consideration.

cc: Jackie Wong, Office of President Pro Tem
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