



Date February 27, 2017

To: The Honorable Richard Pan
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

RE: CALWORKS HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) respectfully requests your support to ensure that homeless families in California's CalWORKs program can access safe, temporary housing. Homelessness is a critical barrier to self-sufficiency and to the health and well-being of children, families, and society. Specifically, we are seeking to eliminate a requirement that days of homeless assistance must be taken consecutively, increase the daily per diem rate, and clarify eligibility for CalWORKs families impacted by the dependency system.

The CalWORKs Homeless Assistance Program provides temporary, as well as permanent, homeless assistance to families who are receiving or are eligible to receive CalWORKs. Temporary homeless assistance can provide payments for a shelter or hotel/motel for families who are homeless and actively searching for permanent housing for up to 16 days, but current statute mandates that these days be consecutive. This means that any break in assistance, even if only for a single day, renders the family ineligible for any remaining days of shelter for which they are otherwise eligible. This requirement can have the unintended consequence of forcing a family to choose between having a roof over their heads or, for example, traveling for a job, seeking alternative arrangements with friends or family, or even vacating the hotel due to its unsuitability for children. By simply removing the requirement that the 16 days be consecutive, families will no longer be disincentivized from making decisions that, under any other circumstance would be positive, but in this situation, could result in their return to the street.

In addition to removing the requirement that days of homeless assistance be taken consecutively or forfeited, we also request your support to increase the daily per diem rate to \$85 per day for a family of four or fewer and provide an additional \$15 per day for each additional family member up to a maximum of \$145 daily. The current statutory per diem rate is \$65 for a family of four or fewer, with an additional \$15 per day for each additional family

member up to a maximum of \$125 daily. This daily rate was last increased over ten years ago. Since then the average daily hotel/motel rate has increased each year, such that the \$65 per diem is not sufficient to meet the actual shelter costs for staying in a hotel/motel in California today. This is especially evident in metropolitan areas, but is true throughout the state. Where affordable hotel/motel options may exist, the lodging is located in areas that may not ensure a safe environment for children to stay.

Lastly, we request clarification of eligibility for the Homeless Assistance Programs for CalWORKs recipients whose child or children are in out-of-home placement pursuant to an order of the dependency court. Under current law, these families are not eligible for a CalWORKs grant until the child or children are returned home, but the adults remain eligible for CalWORKs services for a limited time pending reunification of the family. However, once these families lose their grant, they are even more vulnerable to homelessness, and once homeless they are unable to be reunified with their children. Clarifying that these families are eligible for homeless assistance if that assistance is necessary for reunification to occur will serve the dual goals of stabilizing the housing situation of the family and allowing the children to return home.

Homelessness remains one of the most difficult barriers for families in CalWORKs. While the program's caseload has begun to decrease due to the improving economy, requests for homeless assistance remain steady. Further, the numbers of homeless families have risen by as much as 200 percent between 2006 and 2015 (Los Angeles County data.) The CalWORKs Homeless Assistance Program is an important tool counties use to assist families who are homeless, and modernizing our rules about how days may be used, daily per diem rates, and eligibility for CalWORKs families impacted by the dependency system is a key piece of enhancing the program's efficacy. We thank you for your consideration of this request, and for your continued support of California families.

cc: Jennifer Troia, Office of the President Pro Tem
Craig Cornett, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Theresa Pena, Consultant, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Anthony Archie, Consultant, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
Luan Huynh, Office of Senator Holly Mitchell
Bernadette Lawrence, Office of Senator Richard Pan
Mark Newton, Legislative Analysts' 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 Association of Counties
County Caucus