



Date February 27, 2017

To: The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director

**RE: CALWORKS MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE
ABUSE SERVICES**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) respectfully requests your support of families in CalWORKs by allowing counties to offer mental health and substance abuse services to children in the program. We also request your support to align statutory language on CalWORKs mental health services in the Welfare and Institutions Code with related statute on CalWORKs substance abuse services that permits county human services to contract with community-based providers for assessments when the county department is unable to do so.

County human services departments are responsible for providing CalWORKs welfare-to-work services, which in California include mental health and substance abuse treatment for the welfare-to-work eligible adult(s) in the household. There is funding specifically provided for these services separate from the funding provided for other welfare-to-work services in the CalWORKs Single Allocation. Since the CalWORKs Family Stabilization Program was implemented three years ago, experience has shown that the barriers to family stability and the ability for the adult in the household to obtain and maintain employment include the behavioral health issues of the children. Furthermore, in recent years, the federal Administration for Children and Families, with an eye towards expanding evidence-based practices in TANF, provided guidance that states may use TANF block grant funds for two-generation approaches. Allowing county human service departments to use their mental health and substance abuse funds to also serve children in CalWORKs cases is both in keeping with a two-generation approach and promotes the overall goal of family self-sufficiency by supporting the family system in achieving stability and well-being.

In addition to our desire to provide services to children, CWDA is seeking statutory clarification change that would allow county human services departments to contract with community-based providers of mental health services to provide timely assessment for

CalWORKs clients when the county behavioral health department is unable to do so. County human services departments already have this authority with regard to providing mental health services, but not for the assessments. Current statute also permits contracting with community-based providers for substance abuse services and assessments, as necessary. CWDA would like to align the ability to contract with community-based providers when necessary for assessments and services across mental health and substance abuse programs.

County human services departments value our partnerships and work closely with county behavioral health departments to coordinate services for CalWORKs recipients. Yet capacity issues in county behavioral health programs can make getting timely assessments challenging. The flexibility to contract with community-based providers for mental health assessments is particularly important in light of the shortening of the time limit for welfare-to-work services to 24 months that was enacted SB 1041 (Chapter 47, Statutes of 2012). The shorter time limits in CalWORKs make quickly addressing mental health needs all the more critical for CalWORKs recipients. When an urgent mental health crisis goes unaddressed, participants are less able and therefore less likely to engage in other welfare-to-work services, which directly undermines the well-being of the individual and places unnecessary roadblocks on their path to self-sufficiency.

For these reasons, we respectfully request your support to allow use of CalWORKs mental health and substance abuse funds to serve children in the program, and to permit county human services departments to contract with community-based providers for the provision of mental health assessments.

Attachment: CWDA Trailer Bill Language – Mental Health and Substance Abuse

cc: Gail Gronert, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Chris Woods, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Cyndi Hillery, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Marla Cowan, Office of Assembly Member Joaquin Arambula
Mark Newton, Legislative Analyst's 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 State Association of Counties
County Caucus