



February 13, 2024

To: The Honorable Caroline Menjivar
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

The Honorable Dr. Corey Jackson
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2

From: Eileen Cubanski, CWDA Interim Executive Director

**RE: EMERGENCY SERVICES AND DISASTER RESPONSE
SUPPORT**

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) requests your support for \$14 million General Fund (GF) annually to provide dedicated funding and resources to bolster county human services departments' emergency services and disaster preparedness and response.

BACKGROUND

Over the past 7 years, the state has experienced an unprecedented number of emergencies and disasters — catastrophic wildfires, earthquakes, intensive storms with severe flooding, civil unrest, and COVID-19. California will be recovering from these complex disasters for at least the next decade, while continuing to respond to and recover from future disasters. Counties — and county human services agencies in particular — are at the front line of these response efforts.

County Human Services Agencies Provide Frontline Emergency Services and Disaster Response Support in all Phases: The California State Emergency Plan places the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) as the lead state entity for mass care and shelter disaster response. This state structure, however, adopts a local first emergency management system, putting local government emergency plans at the forefront of emergency response. Therefore, when disasters occur, county human services agencies have responsibility under emergency response plans for the mass care and shelter of their county residents. The provision of mass care and shelter includes feeding, basic first aid, bulk distribution of needed

personal services items, providing short-term emergency shelter or housing for persons displaced from their residence because of a disaster incident, among other activities. Depending on the severity of the incident, disaster housing may take various forms including, temporary evacuation centers, short-term emergency sheltering, and interim housing.

County human services staff are diverted from regular job duties to help facilitate and staff shelters, help victims apply for benefits, and coordinate care with community and health care organizations. Counties have also taken on increased roles and responsibilities, including the coordination of human and material resources to establish mass care and shelter services throughout their jurisdiction, disaster notifications and outreach, assisting program recipients with disaster assistance applications, transportation of program clients, and providing services to persons considered to be part of the “access and functional needs” population, in need of targeted and/or specialized services. Additionally, most county human services departments are tasked and are the lead department for post-disaster recovery support and services, with one-third of counties reporting that they provide support or services for more than 12 months after an event. Despite providing support and care coordination for people affected by disasters, counties are often not reimbursed by federal disaster funds, and have to use their own departmental funds.

Redirection of County Staff for Disaster Response Jeopardizes Counties’ Existing Duties of Serving Vulnerable Clients: When a disaster strikes, impacted counties must immediately redirect some proportion of their staff to emergency response activities; the personnel redirected include caseworkers, social workers, and others whose regular work is critical to the timely provision of human services programs. The number of staff, and length of time of the redirection, varies by the severity and duration of the disaster. While counties’ staff are redirected for this critical work, their service and support to clients served in county human service programs – particularly CalFresh, CalWORKs, Child Welfare Services, Medi-Cal eligibility, Adult Protective Services and In-Home Supportive Services – are diminished. Counties are hindered in their ability to successfully deliver services during an emergency while maintaining their level of service and commitment to clients in human services programs without dedicated funding and staffing for emergency services and disaster support.

Specific Investments in County Human Services Department Response are Critical

County human services agencies currently have limited capacity to timely deliver disaster-specific services to lower-income individuals who may have specialized needs. Dedicated staff, funding and resources for counties are needed to improve emergency and disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. To this end, CWDA requests \$14 million GF annually ongoing to provide every county with funding for up to one full time employee, or equivalent resources, for the purposes of:

- Emergency response planning for continuity of key human services programs and benefits prior to a disaster.
- Supporting and coordinating response efforts during a disaster, including the continued provision of human services programs and benefits.
- Supporting recovery efforts after a disaster.
- Supporting neighboring counties in a mutual aid capacity with continuation of human services programs and benefits when they suffer a disaster.

Note that this request is not for additional resources to cover the costs of all the staff and resources that are redirected during a disaster. Rather, we are only seeking resources for one staff person per county human services agency to help them better plan and coordinate local resources, during both the disaster and recovery, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster response. Without this funding, county human services agencies will continue to struggle to maintain the operation of basic, necessary social service programs as existing staff and resources must be redirected to responding to the immediate needs of the community in disasters that are occurring with greater frequency and intensity.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Cc: Chris Woods, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Mareva Brown, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Jason Sisney, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Kelsy Castillo, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Elizabeth Schmitt, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Committee on Budget Subcommittee No. 2
Kirk Feely, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
Joe Shinstock, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Krista Pfefferkorn, Office of Senator Weiner
Kimberly Fuentes, Office of Senator Menjivar
Dubrea Sanders, Office of Assembly Member Jackson
Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst's Office
Richard Figueroa, Office of the Governor
Angela Pontes, Office of the Governor
Marko Mijic, Health and Human Services Agency
Kim Johnson, California Department of Social Services
Kris Cook, HHS, Department of Finance
Justin Garrett, California State Association of Counties
County Caucus