



**CWDA**

Advancing Human Services  
for the Welfare of *All* Californians

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February 6, 2023

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

Honorable Members  
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

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

Honorable Members  
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Cathy Senderling-McDonald, CWDA Executive Director

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

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) requests your support for \$141 million General Fund (GF) in 2023-24 and \$130 million GF annually thereafter to provide funding and resources to bolster county human services departments' emergency services and disaster preparedness and response.

**Background**

Over the past five years, the state has experienced an unprecedented number of emergencies and disasters, including but not limited to record-breaking wildfires, the pandemic, and devastating statewide flooding and winds this year. Funding for disaster-related work outside of regular work activities overwhelmingly comes from existing county department budgets and takes significant time to be reimbursed, if it is reimbursed at all. This has resulted in significant strain on county human services budgets during recent disasters, which in turn further reduces counties' capacity to respond to new emergencies. Additionally, there is an adverse impact to the operations of ongoing, day-to-day program activities for vulnerable populations through the state's social service programs.

County human services agencies are at the front line of disaster response and recovery. They are the lead for Emergency Support Function (ESF) #6, which includes the primary functions of Mass Care and Shelter. The provision of mass care and shelter includes feeding, basic first

aid, bulk distribution of needed personal services items to persons affected by a large-scale incident, 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, for example, temporary evacuation centers, short-term emergency sheltering, and interim housing.

Eighty-nine percent of counties indicate that funding and staffing support are their top need to delivery services during an emergency. Counties typically must redirect personnel for emergency and disaster response, including caseworkers, social workers, and others whose regular work is critical to the timely provision of human services programs. While the proportion of staff redirected outside their regular jobs during disasters varies across counties, some counties report having to redirect more than 50 percent of their staff due to past emergencies. When a disaster strikes, impacted counties must immediately redirect some proportion of their staff to emergency response activities. The number of staff, and length of time of the redirection, varies by the severity and duration of the disaster. At the same time, the vulnerable populations served in county human service programs – particularly CalFresh, CalWORKs, CWS, Medi-Cal, APS and IHSS – have an increased need for support at the very time that county staff resources are stretched thin. Maintaining staff support, and ensuring adequate funding, are both critically necessary during a disaster.

Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of county human services departments have expanded significantly beyond just the provision of mass care and shelter services. In addition to mass care and shelter, counties take on coordination of resources 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” (AFN) population, in need of targeted and/or specialized services. Additionally, county human services departments often are providing services well after a disaster occurs, with one-third reporting that they provide support or services for more than 12 months after an event. Most county human services departments are tasked with post-disaster recovery support and services, and they are typically the lead department for this work.

### **Specific Investments in County Human Services Department Response are Critical**

Human services programs currently have limited capacity to timely deliver disaster-specific services to lower-income individuals who may have specialized needs. Dedicated staff, funding and resources are greatly needed on the county level to improve emergency and disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. To this end, CWDA requests \$140 million GF in 2023-24 and \$130 million GF annually thereafter to support county human services agencies' response and emergency services work, including the following components:

- \$70 million GF ongoing to provide every county with funding for full-time employees dedicated to coordinating emergency planning, response, and recovery support.
- \$44 million GF in 2023-24 and \$9 million in 2024-25 and ongoing for the purpose of training county staff and volunteers on emergency response.
- \$25 million GF in 2023-24 and \$50 million GF ongoing for development of a fund to support counties affected by disaster each year during a disaster response, supporting mass care and shelter services, and supporting recovery efforts.
- \$1 million GF ongoing for the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to establish a state-county planning group for the purpose of successfully and efficiently improving disaster and emergency response for persons living in poverty, AFN populations, those experiencing pre- and post-disaster homelessness and other disadvantaged communities.

Without this funding, county human services agencies will increasingly struggle to maintain 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. 1  
Kirk Feely, Senate Republican Fiscal Office  
Joe Shinstock, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office  
Jessica Bartholow, Office of Senator Skinner  
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  
Adam Dorsey, HHS, Department of Finance  
Justin Garrett, California State Association of Counties  
County Caucus

