



CWDA
Advancing Human Services
for the Welfare of *All* Californians



**Children
Now**

February 9, 2022

To: The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman
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) and Children Now request your support for \$159 million General Fund (GF) annually to provide funding and resources to bolster county human services departments' emergency services and disaster preparedness and response. We also request a temporary suspension of certain outcome and/or quality improvement activities during a disaster in specified human services programs.

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 and the pandemic. 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 in 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.

Counties 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 redirect over fifty percent of their staff. 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. Eighty-nine percent of counties indicate that funding and staffing support are their top need to delivery services during an emergency.

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 access and functional needs (AFN) specific services. Additionally, county human services departments are providing services well after a disaster occurs, with one-third providing 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 the lead department for this work.

Program-Specific Operational and Support Needs

Child Welfare Services: While everyone struggles in the face of natural disasters, including wildfires, children and youth in foster care and their caregivers deal with a unique set of challenges. For example, families forced to evacuate may leave their communities and move in with friends or relatives in other parts of the state. For a foster family, this is not always an option; children in the foster care system have a right to consistent and regular visitation

with their family members to work towards reunification and/or maintain important relationships. They also have a right to attend their school of origin and often have court hearings or therapy sessions that they are required to attend. When foster families are evacuated or displaced, it becomes extremely challenging to maintain rights aimed at creating stability, nurturing important relationships, and minimizing further disruptions for children in foster care. Additionally, while the State is ultimately responsible for ensuring the needs of children and youth in foster care are met, disaster-impacted children and youth and their caregivers rarely receive the funding needed to cover extra, unexpected costs, including to replace lost belongings, secure temporary housing, or travel to and from a temporary home to appointments and school.

Additionally, counties must prioritize activities during staff shortages and during displacements of families who are caring for foster youth, to ensure critical supports are continued for relative caregivers. This requires building flexibilities into current statutory and regulatory requirements, specifically for the resource family approval process, Payment at Placement for relative caregivers and quality improvement activities.

In-Home Supportive Services: Similarly, IHSS beneficiaries face unique hurdles. IHSS beneficiaries are, by virtue of their eligibility to IHSS services, in need of assistance due to their functional limitations in activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living. Many IHSS recipients are reliant upon their providers for assistance in evacuating during an emergency, and with returning home after an evacuation order has been lifted. Current law allows counties to authorize a change in hours to address an issue arising out of an unexpected event such as a natural disaster, but limits counties from authorizing additional service hours beyond the recipient's current authorized amount. Disaster response should include support to IHSS providers to assist their IHSS client with evacuating to and from a home, to ensure the IHSS client's safety, and this should be fully compensated.

And similar to the child welfare program, staffing impacts necessitate greater flexibility and prioritization of mandated activities. This should include reducing barriers to IHSS recipients, to applicants to the IHSS program, and to providers in completing forms and processes, aligned with the COVID pandemic-related flexibilities, in order promote timely access to services during a disaster, as well as temporary suspension of quality assurance and program integrity activities.

Specific Investments for County Welfare Department Disaster and Emergency 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 and Children Now request \$159 million GF to support county human services agencies' response and emergency services work, including funding for staff, training, support for foster youth and resource families, evacuation support for IHSS recipients, and workgroups to address additional and future needs.

The \$159 million GF request is comprised of 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.
- \$40 million GF in 2022-23 and \$8 million in 2023-24 and ongoing for the purpose of training county staff and volunteers on emergency response.
- \$25 million GF in 2022-23 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.
- \$2 million GF ongoing to provide grants and ensure resources are immediately available to disaster-impacted communities to mitigate the urgent needs of children and youth in foster care and their caregivers.
- \$20 million GF ongoing to safely and effectively aid the most vulnerable IHSS recipients by allowing for additional service hours for the purpose of evacuation, transfer, and re-homing assistance.
- \$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.
- \$1 million GF (one-time) for CDSS to create a task force with CWDA and other relevant stakeholders to make recommendations for establishing a disaster support benefit to support CalWORKs families living in an area where there is a declared disaster.

In addition, we propose implementing temporary flexibilities in the child welfare and IHSS programs to ensure continued support to relative caregivers and IHSS consumers, and temporary suspensions of certain outcome and/or quality improvement activities during a disaster and for 30 days after a disaster is over in the IHSS and Child Welfare Services programs.

Without this funding, county human services agencies will increasingly struggle to maintain operation of social service programs as existing staff and resources are required to 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
Renita Polk, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Committee on Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Marisa Shea, Senate Human Services Committee
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Peter Anderson, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
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