



June 3, 2009

To: The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor, State of California



California Alliance
OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Honorable Members
California Legislature

Re: **OPPOSE CUTS TO CHILD WELFARE, FOSTER CARE,
AND CALWORKS**



We are writing on behalf of a broad coalition of organizations to oppose the cuts being proposed to the child welfare, foster care and CalWORKs programs. We certainly understand the depth of the state's fiscal problems. But cuts of this magnitude would likely make the state's situation worse, and would cause immeasurable harm to innocent dependent children. The negative impacts on individual children, communities, and the economy if these cuts are adopted would simply be too great. From both a human and economic perspective, we urge you to reject the cuts.



The Governor proposes a 10 percent cut to Child Welfare Services and a 10 percent rate reduction for most foster caregivers. He also has proposed to eliminate the CalWORKs program outright, after initially proposing significant cuts including an additional 6 percent grant reduction and elimination of the safety net for children whose parents are timed-off of the program or otherwise unable to work.



Children's Advocacy Institute

These proposed cuts come on top of years of underfunding and direct cuts to these programs, which provide vital services to the most vulnerable children in the state. Despite a 24 percent increase in the cost of living over the past eight years, foster caregivers have received only a 5 percent increase, and not all received that. In the case of child welfare, substantial progress has been made in recent years to improve outcomes for children and families, including less use of foster care, more partnerships with community-based organizations to prevent abuse and neglect and strengthen at-risk families, and a greater focus on finding permanent homes for children who cannot live safely with their biological parents.



CWDA

Cutting nearly \$200 million (total funds) from child welfare and foster care, as proposed, would deal a devastating blow to abused and neglected children and the dedicated people who seek to help them, reversing the strides made in recent years and resulting in unprotected children, fewer quality caregivers, and fewer trained social workers. If these cuts are enacted, lawmakers and the public should expect to see a system that merely responds to tragedies, rather than helping to prevent them.



CalWORKs, in its own right, is a remarkably successful program. The number of people receiving assistance has been cut in half since CalWORKs started. Rather than being a burden on the General Fund, the TANF Block Grant has actually contributed more than \$11 billion to non-CalWORKs state programs since its inception and has helped tens of thousands of Californians enter the workforce.



In today's dire recessionary climate, counties are seeing increases in demand for CalWORKs, as devastated families seek help from a safety net that now threatens to drop them in their time of need. Eliminating CalWORKs would suck additional billions of dollars out of the economy, resulting in greater job loss and pushing the state from its current 11 percent unemployment rate to an estimated 11.8 percent. Note, too, that a grant reduction of 4 percent was enacted in February and is due to take effect in July, despite the availability of federal stimulus funds that would pay for 80 percent of the costs. Reducing the grant by an additional 6 percent, as proposed, would save the state only 20 cents on the dollar and would actually drop CalWORKs grants *below* their 1989 levels.

The families affected by the cuts to CalWORKs are, in many ways, the same families affected by cuts to child welfare services. CalWORKs is the state's largest child abuse prevention program. Research indicates that a family's inability to meet basic needs can result in the abuse or neglect of their children. Common sense dictates that disenrolling children en masse from safety net programs affects their entire future life trajectory. The cuts proposed to these programs are two sides of the same coin, both of which must be rejected.

Finally, these cuts would return billions of dollars to the federal government at a time when the state can scarcely afford to do so. This includes an estimated \$53.7 million in lost federal funding due to the child welfare proposals, as well as the entire CalWORKs block grant of \$3.7 billion per year. A recent analysis by Beacon Economics indicates that human services spending returns an average \$1.32 to the economy for every \$1 spent. The loss of these funds on top of billions in lost state funding will reverberate throughout the local and state economies.

Asking Californians from all walks of life to share the burden of the tremendous deficit facing the state is not an unfair approach. But balancing the budget on the backs of poor and abused children cannot be the answer. We ask you to draw the line at these cuts.

Sincerely,

Willie Pelote
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

Carroll Schroeder
California Alliance for Child and Family Services

Kelly Brooks
California State Association of Counties

Sheila Boxley
The Child Abuse Prevention Center

Ed Howard
Children's Advocacy Institute

Frank J. Mecca
County Welfare Directors Association of California

Tia Orr
SEIU California State Council

Michael Herald
Western Center on Law and Poverty