

Human Services

Section 1: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Counties *are* committed to the delivery of public social services at the local level., However, counties require adequate federal and state funding, maximum local authority, and flexibility for public social services.

Prior to Proposition 13, property taxes were contributing an ever-increasing amount of money to finance human services programs. Until SB 154 (1978) and AB 8 (1979), there was a gradual erosion of local control in the administration of human services due to legislation and regulations promulgated by the state dictating standards, service levels and administrative constraints. .

Despite state assumption of major welfare program costs after Proposition 13, counties continue to be hampered by state administrative constraints and cost-sharing requirements, which ultimately affect the ability of counties to maintain its programs. The state should set minimum standards, allowing counties to enhance and supplement programs according to each county's local needs. To the extent the state requires standards, it should also fully pay the costs for such requirements.

Counties also support providing services for indigents at the local level. However, the state should assume the principal fiscal responsibility for administering programs such as General Assistance. The structure of federal and state programs must not shift costs or clients to county level programs without full reimbursement.

Section 2: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES/FOSTER CARE

A child deserves to grow up in an environment that is healthy, safe, and nurturing. To meet this goal families and caregivers should have access to public and private services that are comprehensive and collaborative.

The existing approach to budgeting and funding child welfare services was established in the mid-1980's. Since that time, dramatic changes in child welfare policy have occurred, as well as significant demographic and societal changes, impacting the workload demands of the current system. Based on the results of the SB 2030 study which provided an updated social worker workload/yardstick in 2000, California's method of budgeting and financing child welfare services needs to be changed. The study confirms that the current financing does not meet the actual workload demands. Additionally, these policy changes necessitate a reevaluation of the required county contribution to child welfare services. Counties support state assumption of an additional portion of non-federal child welfare services costs.

The ideal focus of children's services is to expand the capacity of families and caregivers to meet the needs of their children. Counties believe that this focus continues to be in jeopardy. While there has been some movement in recent years, the preponderance of spending for child welfare services

remains dedicated to court and placement activities, rather than supportive, family-based interventions. Counties have and will continue to provide immediate leadership to focus and obtain additional resources for family preservation and support services.

When, despite the provision of voluntary services, the family or caregiver is unable to minimally ensure or provide a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment, a range of intervention approaches will be undertaken. When determining the appropriate intervention approach, the best interest of the child should always be the first consideration. These efforts to protect the best interest of children and preserve families may include:

1. A structured family plan involving family and all providers, with specific goals and planned actions;
2. A family case planning conference;
3. Intensive home supervision; and/or
4. Juvenile and criminal court diversion contracts.

When a child is in danger of physical harm or neglect, either the child or alleged offender may be removed from the home, and formal dependency and criminal court actions may be taken. Where appropriate, family preservation and support services should be provided.

When parental rights must be terminated, counties support a permanency planning process that quickly places children in the most stable environments, with adoption being the permanent placement of choice. Counties support efforts to accelerate the judicial process for terminating parental rights in cases where there has been serious abuse and where it is clear that the family cannot be reunified. Counties also support adequate state funding for adoption services.

As our focus remains on the preservation and empowerment of families, we believe the potential for the public to fear some increased risk to children is outweighed by the positive effects of a research-supported family preservation emphasis. Within the family preservation and support services approach, the best interest of the child should always be the first consideration. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), allows counties to take care of children regardless of the status of parents.

Section 3: EMPLOYMENT AND SELF- SUFFICIENCY PROGRAMS

There is strong support for the simplification of the administration of public assistance programs. The state should continue to take a leadership role in seeking state and federal legislative and regulatory changes to achieve simplification, consolidation, and consistency across all major public assistance programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), Medicaid, Medi-Cal, and Food Stamps. In addition, electronic technology improvements in welfare administration are an important tool in obtaining a more efficient system.

California counties are far more diverse from county to county than many regions of the United States. The state's welfare structure should recognize this and allow counties flexibility in administering welfare programs. Each county must have the ability to identify differences in the population being served and provide services accordingly, without restraints from federal or state government. There should, however, be as much uniformity as possible in areas such as eligibility

requirements, grant levels and benefit structures. To the extent possible, program standards should seek to minimize incentives for public assistance recipients to migrate within the state.

A welfare system that includes time limits on assistance should also provide sufficient federal and state funding for education, job training, child care, and support services that are necessary to move recipients to self-sufficiency. There should also be sufficient federal and state funding for retention services, such as childcare and additional training, to assist former recipients in maintaining employment. Any state savings from the welfare system should be directed to counties to provide assistance to the effected population for programs at the counties' discretion, such as General Assistance, indigent health care, job training, child care, mental health, alcohol and drug, and other services required to accomplish welfare-to-work goals. In addition, Federal and state programs should include services that accommodate the special needs of people who relocate to the state after an emergency disaster. It is only with adequate resources and flexibility that counties can truly address the fundamental barriers that many families have to self-sufficiency.

The state should assume the principal fiscal responsibility for the General Assistance program.

Finally, welfare-to-work efforts should focus on prevention of the factors that lead to poverty and welfare dependency including, unemployment, underemployment, and lack of educational opportunities. Prevention efforts should also acknowledge the responsibility of absent parents by improving efforts at absent parent location, paternity establishment, child support award establishment, and collection of child support.

Section 4: CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

Counties are committed to strengthening the child support enforcement program through implementation of the child support restructuring effort of 1999. Ensuring a seamless transition and efficient ongoing operations requires sufficient federal and state funding and must not result in any increased county costs. Further, the state must assume full responsibility for any federal penalties for the state's failure to establish a statewide automated child support system. Any penalties passed on to counties would have an adverse impact on the effectiveness of child support enforcement or other county programs.

Moreover, a successful child support enforcement program requires a partnership between the state and counties. Counties must have meaningful and regular input into the development of state policies and guidelines.

Section 5: PROPOSITION 10: THE FIRST FIVE COMMISSION

Proposition 10, the California Children and Families Initiative, provides significant resources to enhance and strengthen early childhood development. Local children and families commissions (First 5 Commissions), established as a result of the passage of Proposition 10, must maintain the full discretion to determine the use of their share of funds generated by Proposition 10. Further, local First 5 commissions must maintain the necessary flexibility to direct these resources to the most appropriate early childhood development needs of their communities. Counties oppose any effort to diminish Proposition 10 funds or to impose restrictions on its expenditure.

In recognition that Proposition 10 funds are under the control of local First 5 commissions and are outside of the traditional county budgeting process, counties oppose any effort to lower or eliminate the state's support for county programs with the expectation that the state or local children and families commissions will backfill the loss with Proposition 10 revenues.

Section 6: REALIGNMENT

In 1991, the state and counties entered into a new fiscal relationship known as realignment. Realignment affects health, mental health, and social services programs and funding. The state transferred control of programs to counties, altered program cost-sharing ratios, and provided counties with dedicated tax revenues from the sales tax and vehicle license fee to pay for these changes.

Counties support the concept of state and local program realignment and the principles adopted by CSAC and the Legislature in forming realignment. Thus, counties believe the integrity of realignment should be protected. However, counties strongly oppose any change to realignment funding that would negatively impact counties. Counties remain concerned and will resist any reduction of dedicated realignment revenues or the shifting of new costs from the state and further mandates of new and greater fiscal responsibilities in this partnership program.

Section 7: FAMILY VIOLENCE

In 2000, the CSAC Family Violence Task Force was established to raise awareness among county supervisors and staff regarding family violence and to highlight efforts that can assist counties in addressing family violence prevention, intervention and treatment. Bridging health and human services and administration of justice policy issues the task force seeks to: (1) develop a continuum of services and treatment, focusing on early intervention; (2) support strong partnerships and collaboration with governmental and non-governmental agencies; and (3) establish best practices with an emphasis on reducing children's exposure to violence. The newly created task force has been instrumental in informing counties on the issue of domestic violence and implementing coordinated strategies between first responders – law enforcement officers and human service workers to provide strategies for county-wide domestic violence prevention efforts. Specific strategies for success should be developed through cooperation between state and local governments as well as community and private organizations addressing family violence issues.