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Plan to Delay Payments will Devastate Californians and County Services

Sacramento – California counties cannot withstand delays in payments from the state and any plan to delay payments will cripple counties ability to provide vital services to Californians, county officials said today.

County officials across the state are gravely concerned by the action Controller John Chiang will be forced to make without a budget solution and his announcement today that he will begin delaying payments to programs such as CalWORKS and mental health services in the coming weeks if the state's cash crisis is not resolved.

“California counties will simply not be able to provide vital services such as CalWORKS, mental health programs and alcohol and drug abuse treatment to our residents at a time when demand for services has drastically increased,” said CSAC President and Imperial County Supervisor Gary Wyatt. “Delaying payments would only pass the state's cash crisis onto counties, and we're already dealing with our own budget crises.”

Supervisor Wyatt and Yolo County Assistant County Administrator Pat Leary joined State Controller Chiang at the press conference today and talked about the unprecedented demand for services counties are experiencing, not only from returning clients but from residents who have never sought government aid. They also discussed the devastating impact payment delays will have on the most vulnerable Californians.

“We have reduced programs, services and even turned down the heat in all of our county buildings in order to save money,” Leary said. “But when the state stops paying their bills, it is counties that feel the heat. As political subdivisions of the state, we run the state programs. It is our offices that out-of-work families turn to for assistance, for food stamps, for job training – it's our staff that provides critical mental health services.”

Statewide, the CalWORKS program, which provides temporary financial assistance and employment focused services to families, has experienced a 22 percent increase in applications from September 2007 to September 2008. During this same time period, the number of cases with two parents increased 15 percent, a sign of the changing face of our applicants in this economic crisis.

“Counties provide the safety net for Californians during difficult times, and there is no doubt that the economic downturn has created significant hardships for Californians,” said Supervisor Wyatt. “We are extremely disappointed that the state's fiscal crisis will force the Controller to delay payments and cripple our ability to deliver much-needed services.”

California counties urge the Governor and Legislature to quickly solve the state's cash crisis and budget situation, and avoid exacerbating the financial challenges Californians and counties are facing.

The California State Association of Counties, headquartered in Sacramento, is the voice of California's 58 counties at the state and federal level.

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