

Governor's Recent Statements on CalWORKs Contradict His Long-Standing Positions on the Program's Success and Flaws in the Federal Work Measures

“Concerns with the TANF Final Rule are not unique to California...The regulatory changes...clearly undermine the intent of Congress to broaden states’ administrative flexibility. Resolving these issues must be a top priority for California. I would like to work with you to ensure that our state maintains the flexibility that will enable us to build upon the successful efforts that have moved over 400,000 cases beyond public assistance in California since 1996.”

(From a letter to Senator Dianne Feinstein and the California Congressional Delegation from California Health and Human Services Secretary Kimberly Belshe urging the preservation of federal flexibility in TANF, September 3, 2008.)

“In addition, the final regulations maintain an ‘all or nothing’ approach to county work participation, establishing minimums of 30 hours/week for single-parent families and 35 hours/week for two-parent families. This is counter to the work-first approach of federal welfare reform as it discounts the valid efforts of TANF participants who may not be meeting the minimum hours, but are making progress toward self sufficiency.”

(From a letter to Senator Dianne Feinstein and the California Congressional Delegation from California Health and Human Services Secretary Kimberly Belshe urging the preservation of federal flexibility in TANF, September 3, 2008.)

“Further, the requirement that states meet a 90 percent work participation rate for two-parent families conflicts with the TANF program’s other goals to promote marriage and strengthen two-parent families. Two-parent families face the same barriers as other TANF families and should be treated consistently and equitably.”

(From a letter to Senator Dianne Feinstein and the California Congressional Delegation from California Health and Human Services Secretary Kimberly Belshe urging the preservation of federal flexibility in TANF, September 3, 2008.)

“We have implemented numerous efforts and policy changes focused at increasing engagement and work participation. These efforts are continual; however, achieving outcomes take time and, in some cases, years to fully benefit persons still on the welfare rolls.”

(From a letter to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) from California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Director John Wagner introducing CDSS comments on proposed new federal rules, September 26, 2008.)

“California has made a number of improvements to our state’s TANF program in an effort to strengthen the ‘work focus’ of our program and increase work participation among our TANF recipients. The recent recalibration of the base year for caseload reduction credit essentially erased nearly a decade of success California achieved in moving families from welfare to work, and had a crippling effect on our state’s ability to meet the federal WPR.”

(From a letter to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) from California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Director John Wagner introducing CDSS comments on proposed new federal rules limiting excess Maintenance of Effort expenditure flexibility, September 26, 2008.)

“Although California has been successful in moving families off the welfare rolls, due to this substantial caseload decline, much of the caseload left on aid appear to be individuals who face significant barriers to employment and who require more services to address and remove those barriers. In addition, the dynamics of how we serve our caseload has changed. The strengthened ‘work focus’ requires California to provide more case management and supportive services, including child care, to aided and former TANF individuals in order to enable these individuals to participate or continue working.”

(From CDSS comments to ACF on proposed new federal rules limiting excess Maintenance of Effort expenditure flexibility, September 26, 2008.)

“Current projections also indicate that more families will need assistance due to the adverse impact of the weak economy (i.e., increased unemployment, home foreclosures, rising food costs and fuel prices). While California will continue to make every effort to increase work participation rates, the projected rising caseload will result in further financial strain on the state’s TANF program.”

(From CDSS comments to ACF on proposed new federal rules limiting excess Maintenance of Effort expenditure flexibility, September 26, 2008.)

“California is dedicated to moving families to work and toward self-sufficiency, and this is evidenced by the success our state has achieve in connecting individuals to jobs and reducing our caseload by almost 50 percent since the start of the TANF program. Although it has become more challenging to meet the target work participation rates since TANF Reauthorization, the imperative of the DRA is a serious priority for our state.”

(From CDSS comments to ACF on proposed new federal rules limiting excess Maintenance of Effort expenditure flexibility, September 26, 2008.)

“California has implemented numerous new strategies and state policy changes focused on reengaging our sanctioned and non-compliant families as well as working with those who are partially participating to achieve the full level of participation required. With our renewed efforts at fully engaging all able-bodied adults we anticipate positive outcomes in this arena in the years to come.”

(From CDSS comments to ACF on proposed new federal rules limiting excess Maintenance of Effort expenditure flexibility, September 26, 2008.)

The work participation rate, however, is just one requirement and important goal of the program. Maintaining state spending on programs that support families is another.”

(From CDSS comments to ACF on proposed new federal rules limiting excess Maintenance of Effort expenditure flexibility, September 26, 2008.)

“Although California is receiving the same block grant amount for a substantially smaller caseload, the reality is that the costs to serve our caseload have increase considerably over the years. This is partially attributed to the strenthened ‘work’ emphasis of the program and the rising costs of providing necessary services to

enable recipients to participate. However, this is also attributed to the overall rising costs of living and costs of doing business in our state.”

(From CDSS comments to ACF on proposed new federal rules limiting excess Maintenance of Effort expenditure flexibility, September 26, 2008.)

“The well-being of families is California’s utmost concern and mission. The potential loss of discretionary state spending on low-income families and other needy populations is inconsistent with the goal of California’s TANF program as well as the goals of PRWORA.”

(From CDSS comments to ACF on proposed new federal rules limiting excess Maintenance of Effort expenditure flexibility, September 26, 2008.)

“At this juncture, we would encourage ACF to evaluate whether it will be creating a more level playing field that support states in their efforts to assist families to achieve self-sufficiency or will be setting up a system that instead encourages state to adopt harsh restrictions on eligibility or to create solely state funded programs in order to remove families from the federally counted caseload who cannot possibly meet federal participation standards. We believe that this should not be the intention of ‘reform.’”

(From a letter to ACF from Interim CDSS Director Cliff Allenby introducing CDSS comments on proposed new ACF rules related to the reauthorization of TANF, August 25, 2006.)