



Press Release

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Counties Dismayed State Pushing Ahead with Changes to In-Home Care Services, Leaving Elderly and Disabled Vulnerable

Counties can't meet the state's Sunday deadline and ask for reasonable extension

SACRAMENTO – A looming deadline to implement changes to the In-Home Supportive Services program will leave up to 450,000 elderly and disabled people vulnerable because the state has not provided accurate and complete instructions on the changes, county welfare advocates testified Wednesday at a joint legislative hearing.

Counties, recipients and caregivers are fearful that thousands of elderly and disabled people will not receive critical services starting Monday because caregivers are unable to complete a confusing, new enrollment process. The state has failed to provide adequate material and funding to counties to make the changes scheduled to be implemented by Sunday, November 1 – just two business days from today.

Following the more than two hour hearing, county welfare advocates were dismayed the state is moving forward with changes to the program given the scores of questions raised and left unanswered. The Administration has created a Catch-22 by prohibiting counties from using the current approval process for caregivers, but making it impossible to use the new enrollment process, county advocates said.

“We are shocked by the state’s complacent acceptance that the best we can do is tell the elderly and disabled who depend on these services to remain safely in their homes ‘we’re sorry, we can’t meet the deadline.’ We’ve never been asked to do that before and we shouldn’t be asked to do that now. The Sunday deadline is ludicrous,” said Frank Mecca, executive director of the County Welfare Directors Association. “We welcome state staff to visit one of our county In-Home Supportive Services offices and see firsthand the chaos and confusion the state has created by not providing accurate and complete directions.”

The legislative hearing clearly showed the state has mishandled implementation of program changes enacted in the 2009-10 budget, and left counties with more questions than answers. That includes counties being unable to enroll and establish eligibility for caregivers because of incomplete processing instructions for criminal background checks and required orientation sessions.

In addition, because of the state’s computer system, new caregivers who have not completed all the necessary steps will not be paid. That means recipients are left with two untenable options: either pay for the services or ask their caregivers to work for free starting Sunday, with the hope that retroactive pay will be provided once a caregiver’s enrollment is established. In reality, many elderly or disabled people will simply go without services and be forced into nursing homes or live in unsafe conditions.

A growing number of counties have notified the state that they will be unable to meet the Sunday deadline, including:

- Los Angeles County, where services are provided to more than 185,000 people, and more than 4,000 new applications are processed each month. Offices have been flooded with caregivers

trying to submit forms and complete fingerprinting requirements, even though the state has not given counties final instructions on the process. Just the fingerprinting process is expected to cost the county \$1.2 million – a cost the Legislature appropriated money for but has not been allocated to counties.

- Sonoma County, where county staff has had to redirect already depleted resources into answering the barrage of questions from anxious and fearful clients and caregivers. The county also has a significant number of Spanish-speaking caregivers who need translated enrollment forms and the orientation CD, which the state has not provided and has indicated may take several months to provide.
- San Bernardino County, where the county notified the state that “our lobbies are flooded, telephones ring continuously, and staff have insufficient information to provide answers.” The county also has just one orientation site equipped to play the orientation CD for caregivers, placing an additional cost and burden on the county to purchase projection screens and set them up.

“In Sonoma County, one elderly woman called her social worker immediately when she received the letter. She was anxious about leaving her home because of fear that she would miss the unannounced home visit that is part of program changes, and that her absence might terminate her from the program - she was afraid to leave the house,” said Diane Kaljian, Sonoma County Director of Adult and Aging Services. “Just this past Monday, one of our staff received a call from a bipolar client in frail physical health who had spent the weekend worrying that her provider of 10 years wouldn’t be able to continue to work for her. This woman was hysterical and anxious, as was her provider. The woman required both psychiatric assistance and help from her medical doctor in order to calm her fears.”

Counties have asked for a 90- to 120-day extension from the time the state is able to provide complete and detailed information on implementing all of the major program changes. They also asked for more collaboration by the state to improve the quality of program instructions and avoid a piecemeal approach to making changes.

County advocates supported Assembly Member Noreen Evans calls for more time to implement the changes and for clean-up language to address the many unanswered questions.

The hearing followed an October 19 court-issued preliminary injunction that directed the California Department of Social Services to halt implementation of the IHSS service reduction provisions due to the state’s unfair method for determining whose services would be affected by the 2009-10 budget cuts.

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) is a nonprofit association representing the human service directors from each of California's 58 counties. The Association's mission is to promote a human services system that encourages self-sufficiency of families and communities, and protects vulnerable children and adults from abuse and neglect.

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