

I am Will Lightbourne, social services director of Santa Clara County and I am also speaking on behalf of the County Welfare Directors Association.

Frankly, it never occurred to me that I or anyone else would be speaking to you regarding the elimination of the CalWORKs program, as it never occurred to me that any administration would be so reckless as to propose it.

Half a million families – a million children -- in the state participate in this program. Its very limited cash grants denominate the difference between their barely getting by and their immediate descent into homelessness. Not poverty – they already live in poverty under our grant levels which are already being cut on July 1st back to 1988 levels – but complete destitution.

That is a word and a condition, “destitution,” that civilized states do not allow even the most troubled and troubling of its members to endure – let alone one million of its children. And no civilized modern state has proposed this as a budget-balancing measure – until now.

The proposal to eliminate the CalWORKs program is perhaps a cynical ploy to make the earlier May Revision proposals suddenly palatable. They are not. To eliminate coverage for child-only and safety net children just reduces the number of children punished with destitution from a million to a quarter of a million.

What are the consequences in systemic terms? There are not the shelter beds. Demographers have established the absolute correlation between reductions in assistance and increases in child maltreatment. When children are disenrolled en masse from child care and early learning programs their entire future life trajectory is diminished. When the safety net is eliminated in whole or part, all of the societal relationships are broken, and what were communities become camps.

CalWORKs is a remarkably successful program. The number of people on aid has been reduced by half since it started, and far from being a burden on the General Fund the TANF Block Grant has contributed over \$11 billion to non-CalWORKs State programs.

Yes, the State has a budget problem. And we understand services need to be prioritized and difficult choices made. Of course we understand that, as social services programs seem always to be disproportionately targeted for reductions. But to say “We have weighed the relative importance of these children against everything else that California can afford, and the children lost” is unworthy of us as a people.