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SIERRA COUNTY

CalWORKS County Plan Amendment

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I hereby certify that the Sierra County Board of Supervisors was briefed regarding the contents of this plan amendment prior to submittal.

County Welfare Director's Signature	**Carol Roberts, PhD** **Printed Name**	**12/19/2006** **Briefing Date**

This plan amendment is submitted pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code Section 10534

BACKGROUND

The attached amendment to Sierra County Department of Social Services CalWORKS Plan has been developed by Sierra County Department of Human Services, in accordance with the passage of AB1808 (Chapter 75, Statutes of 2006).

AB 1808 enacted Welfare & Institutions Code Section 10534, which requires each county to perform a comprehensive review of its existing CalWORKS Plan and prepare and submit to the State of California Department of Social Services a plan amendment detailing how the county will implement strategies for increasing Work Participation Rates (WPR).

If California does not meet federally required Work Participation Rates (WPR), the State will incur a fiscal penalty of up to five percent ($187 million) of the State's block grant in the first year. This penalty can increase two percent each year, up to 21 percent. Welfare and Institutions (W&I) Code Section 10544 requires the state to pass on 50% of federal penalties to counties that fail to meet federal WPR requirements.

In addition to avoiding fiscal penalties, counties may earn Pay for Performance program incentive funds by improving their federal WPR, their employment rate, rate of families leaving aid due to employment, and rate of families leaving aid due to employment with higher earnings.

Federal law changed the base year that is used for calculating the caseload reduction credit from federal fiscal year (FFY) 1995 to FFY 2005. This means that California will no longer receive credit for its 46.4 percent caseload reduction realized between FFY 1995 and FFY 2004.

Federal Work Participation Rates require a minimum 50 percent participation for all families and 90 percent participation for two-parent families.

Following state review and approval of Sierra County Department of Human Services' CalWORKS Plan Amendment, the Plan Amendment will be incorporated into a detailed and updated Sierra County CalWORKS Policies and Procedures Manual.

The enclosed amendment follows a template provided by the State of California Department of Social Services. All headings are generated by this template and responses conform to specific information requested by the state.

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1) COUNTY GOALS

A. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE COUNTY WILL MEET THE GOALS OF W & I CODE 10540

It is a primary goal of the CalWORKS program of Sierra County Department of Social Services to meet the goals defined in Welfare and Institutions (W & I) Code Section 10540, while taking into consideration the work participation requirements of the Federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005

County goals are as follows:

1. **Reduce Child Poverty:**

   Reduction of Child Poverty is an overarching goal of Sierra County Department of Social Services CalWORKS program. As a tight-knit, rural community with a strong family orientation, maximizing the current and future success of the county's children is a priority. To this end, Sierra County Department of Social Services strives to meet state and federal requirements, while keeping the needs of local children as a number one priority.

   All goals discussed in the county plan have the ultimate goal of reducing child poverty. Goals as outlined below include promotion of job preparation activities for parents, promotion of employment opportunities, support of multi-caregiver households, where feasible, and transmission of life skills training in areas such as the development of positive support systems, money management, and maximization of economic opportunities.

2. **Reduce Dependence of Needy Parents on Government Benefits Through the Following Mechanisms:**

   a. **Promotion of Job Preparation:**

      Sierra County Department of Social Services is in the process of developing the Sierra Work Connection, in collaboration with the Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium (NoRTEC). Bringing this excellent new resource into the community is expected to revitalize and enhance services previously provided as a component of Job Club.

      CalWORKS participants will be provided training and support in the following areas:

      1. Job Search
      2. Completion of a work history/application template
      3. Completion of a resume
      4. Participation in interview role-play, with related feed-back.
      5. Education regarding employer/employee relationships and related expectations

Sierra County Department of Social Services will work towards enhancement of current opportunities for community service, through exploration and engagement of community resources. Local and regional employers will be contacted to promote opportunities for CalWORKS participants to actively practice job skills, enhance their resume, and acquire new knowledge, while meeting CalWORKS participation requirements.

Sierra County Department of Social Services will continue to participate in review of local work opportunities and general employment trends, as discussed in the Government Occupational Outlook Handbook, and California Labor Market Information (www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov). Awareness of job trends and individual assessment will be utilized in assisting participants with educational goals.

Sierra County Department of Social Services will explore collaboration with the Feather River Community College and other community colleges in Northern California, with a focus on meeting the job training needs of a rural community.

Through collaboration with NoRTEC, Sierra County Department of Social Services CalWORKS participants will now have access to a computer lab that can be used for on-line classes. Options for distance learning will be explored through development of collaborations with community colleges, with a focus on collaboration with Feather River Community College.

b. Promotion of Employment Opportunities:

Sierra County Department of Social Services will maintain a presence at Sierra County Department of Social Services Board of Economic Development meetings, in the interest of being an active motivator and initiator of employment opportunities in the local community.

CalWORKS participants will be involved in education regarding how to locate employment opportunities, through Sierra Work Connection, in collaboration with NoRTEC. The collaboration with NoRTEC replaces the former Job Club.

As NoRTEC, an entity focused on the needs of rural Northern California, will be a driving force in development of Sierra Work Connection, development of employment opportunities will target the unique needs of an extremely rural community.

In the interest of addressing the extremely rural nature of Sierra County, exploration of increased opportunities for transportation enhancement will be a priority throughout the next fiscal year. Strategies for increasing transportation options include the following:

1. Promotion of ride-sharing in the community-at-large.
2. Development of a community-wide effort to explore potential solutions, such gifting and repair of vehicles that are no longer being used, in collaboration with local community-based organizations.

3. Exploration of promotion of off-site employment such as medical billing services or medical transcription, or other potential service provision opportunities.
4. Partnership with the local Senior Program transportation services.

c. Support of Marriage/Encouragement of the Formation and Maintenance of Two-Parent Families:

To supplement current life skills educational components, Sierra County Department of Social Services will develop and provide education designed to increase awareness of the components of successful relationships and navigation of stress points within a committed relationship.

Educational components will be specifically targeted to CalWORKS participants, and an assessment of financial and other life stressors on significant relationships and potential coping mechanisms will be a component of CalWORKS assessment.

Educational components will be based largely on research done by John Gottman, Phd, and the Gottman Institute.

The local faith-based community will be encouraged to incorporate research into work with church-going community members, and to utilize county outreach and educational programs, in the interest of increasing no-cost marital support in the community.

Single participants will be encouraged to define qualities they want in a potential partner, and qualities they would like to avoid. Information regarding warning signs of an abusive partner will be available to all participants.

Referrals to counseling will be provided, targeted to specific client need.

d. Reduction of Out-of-Wedlock Births:

Family planning will be a component of money management education. Sierra County Department of Public Health will increase and enhance community outreach efforts related to family planning. Individual assessments will include assessment of family planning needs for all participants. Referrals will be provided to Public Health, as warranted.

3. Meet the requirements of federal law:

All services will be provided in accordance with state and federal law. At the end of three years, it is anticipated that Sierra County will fully meet Federal Work Participation Requirements of 50% participation for all families and 90% participation for two-parent families.

4. Avoidance of Unintended or Unanticipated Outcomes

In meeting requirements of federal law, Sierra County Department of Social Services strives to avoid unanticipated outcomes that negatively affect child well being. Participants will not be discouraged from accessing needed aid. While regulations support the promotion of two-parent families, no participant or potential participant will be encouraged to stay in an abusive situation, or any situation which is potentially detrimental to their well-being, or the well-being of their children. In striving for optimal outcomes, each situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis

As stated above in section c, all CalWORKs participants will be given information on domestic violence and local domestic violence resources. Stressors related to finances and interpersonal issues which may negatively impact financial autonomy will be explored with all participants.

In situations where domestic violence is a barrier to employment, the client situation will be assessed on an individual basis, keeping client safety foremost. Clients will be informed of their options and interventions meeting their particular need will be incorporated into their Welfare to Work Plan, where applicable.

This may include referral to counseling services, or referral for advocacy assistance. Clients in need of a safety plan will be referred to Sierra Safe, a local domestic violence advocacy group. Client safety plan recommendations will be available at Sierra County Integrated Case Worker offices.

2) PARTICIPATION IMPROVEMENT

B. PROVIDING UP-FRONT ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Provision of Up-Front Engagement Activities

Sierra County Department of Social Services is implementing a new policy whereby non-exempt participants who are deemed eligible for aid, will be offered orientation immediately, as a component of the initial face-to-face interview. Participants who are unable to participate in orientation the same day eligibility for aid is determined will be scheduled a follow-up appointment within one week of eligibility determination.

The following information will be included in the orientation provided at the time of the initial face-to-face interview:

a. Overview of Welfare-to-Work parameters
b. Participation requirements
c. Employment and training services available

d. Supportive services available
e. Fair Hearing & Appeals process
f. Good Cause/Conciliation/Sanction process
g. Time limits for receiving aid
h. Appraisal of reading, writing and mathematical abilities.
i. CAPS, COPES, COPS assessment opportunities

The orientation will include an initial exploration of the participant's employment goals, abilities, and history, as well as an exploration of possible barriers to employment. Clients will be able to participate in CASAS testing, or CAPS, COPES, COPS appraisal at the time of orientation, if deemed appropriate. For clients struggling with a lengthy orientation process, appraisal will be scheduled within three days of orientation, wherever possible.

If outside issues are identified during the initial interview (i.e., mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, etc.), the participant will be referred to additional supportive services. Ideally, supportive service needs will be identified and appointments will be made on the day of the initial contact. Otherwise, supportive service appointments will be made the day of CalWORKS appraisal.

2. Anticipated Effects and Percentage of Families Affected Monthly

The anticipated impact on having participants complete orientation at the time eligibility is determined is anticipated to impact 100% of non-exempt participants. Participants will be assigned to a job search activity the same day they are appraised for services, subsequent to completion of orientation.

In addition to participants initiating job search activity, if the participant is an appropriate candidate for job search, the day of appraisal, participants will be scheduled for an appointment for review of job search success, assessment, and development of a Welfare-to-Work Plan, where indicated.

Having an appointment for development of a Welfare-to-Work Plan the day the participant is deemed eligible for services and/or participates in orientation is expected to decrease the wait time for development of a Welfare to Work Plan by at least one month for all participants. Additionally, this decrease in wait will further allow barriers to employment to be assessed and addressed in a timely manner, for maximum impact.

The decrease in wait will be due to a combined impact of a decrease in waiting periods between eligibility determination, orientation, and assignment to an activity. This cumulative impact will be significant. It is expected that 100% of county participants will be impacted.

3. Assessment of Effects

Success will be determined by a quantifiable increase in the county's Work Participation Rate for all participants.

It is anticipated that a policy of immediate engagement and reduction of sanction times will increase the county's Work Participation from approximately 32.9 percent to the required Work Participation Rates of a minimum of 50 percent participation for single parent non-exempt families, and 90 percent participation for two-parent non-exempt families.

C. ACHIEVING FULL ENGAGEMENT BY INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE REQUIRED TO PARTICIPATE, AND WHO ARE PARTIALLY PARTICIPATING, NOT PARTICIPATING, OR ARE BETWEEN ACTIVITIES

1. Policies and Strategies That Will Result in Program Improvement

Sierra County Department of Social Services will be implementing new policy focused on development of community service opportunities and apprenticeship programs for CalWORKS participants. Concurrent with fostering of new collaborations for community service opportunities, Sierra County Department of Social Services will work with eligible participants up-front to identify potential community service areas in which they have a specific personal interest.

Community service hours will be utilized to increase participation in federally allowable activities when participants are between activities, or need additional hours to meet the weekly participation requirement.

Implementation of the Sierra Work Connection is expected to further assist in achieving full engagement by individuals who are partially participating, not participating, or are between activities.

The expedited process which will allow the county to assist participants with barriers to employment in a more timely manner is expected to positively impact participation rates across the board.

2. Anticipated Effects and Percentage of Families Affected Monthly

The changes in policy and development of new community service opportunities is expected to benefit all recipients by providing enhanced opportunities for individual participation and personal growth. One hundred percent of non-exempt Welfare to Work participants not fully participating or partially participating are expected to be impacted by described changes in policy.

The changes in policy and development of new resources is expected to result in a move from exempt to non-exempt status for a minimum of 10% of the total number of exempt individuals.

3. Assessment of Effects

Success will be determined by a quantifiable increase in the county's Work Participation Rate for all participants who are not participating or who are partially participating (currently 16% percent of the caseload). It is anticipated that the percentage of non-exempt recipients who are nonparticipating or who are partially participating will decrease by at least 50% to 8% or less of

the total caseload. The targeted goal is 100% engagement of 100% of non-exempt participants, and a decrease of participants moving to exempt status by 25%.

D. PROVIDING ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION AND TO PREVENT FAMILIES FROM GOING TO SANCTION STATUS

A. Policies and Strategies That Will Result in Program Improvement

Sierra County Department of Social Services is moving from a having a divided system of Eligibility Workers and Employment and Training Workers, to an integrated system whereby both eligibility determination and employment and training services are provided by Integrated Case Workers. This policy has the positive impact of decreasing the number of Welfare-to-Work participants assigned to a given caseload. This combining of caseloads allows for development of a new policies which allow for better tracking of clients in danger of being sanctioned, or who are sanctioned, and a quicker response time.

CalWORKS caseloads will be reviewed on a weekly basis. Sierra County Department of Social Services Integrated Case Worker staff will follow-up with face-to-face contact to assist anyone entering into noncompliant or sanctioned status, identify barriers to participation, and address identified barriers in a timely manner.

All integrated caseworker staff responsible to Welfare to Work will be provided ongoing training specific to identifying and resolving barriers to nonparticipation, such as substance abuse, child care, or transportation issues.

The best identified practice for preventing families from going to sanction status is appropriate identification of barriers at the time of assessment, and immediate response to barriers, as discussed in section B.

Sierra County Department of Social Services uses and will continue to use the recommended form *Request to Stop a WTW Sanction* (WTW 31).

Sierra County Department of Social Services conducts WTW home visits, and will continue to conduct WTW home visits. With expansion of staff due to movement to an Integrated Case Worker model, an increase in home visits related to Welfare to Work is expected.

B. Anticipated Effects and Percentage of Families Affected Monthly

The proactive approach to sanctioned individuals is expected to decrease the waiting period between initial contact, determination of eligibility and assessment for 100% of participants. It is anticipated that new policies will increase total participation rates by approximately 25%.

It is anticipated that the percentage of non-exempt recipients who are nonparticipating or who are partially participating will decrease by at least 50% to 8% or less of the total caseload.

C. Assessment of Effects

Success will be determined by a quantifiable increase in the county's Work Participation Rate for all participants, and measurable decreases in waiting periods between all stages of the CalWORKS process (see Section H).

E. REENGAGING NONCOMPLIANT OR SANCTIONED INDIVIDUALS

1. Policies and Strategies That Will Result in Program Improvement

The current CalWORKS Plan Amendment focuses on engaging participants in an immediate manner, from the start of services. This includes timely identification of barriers to participation.

With the incorporation of integrated caseworkers, there will be a proactive approach utilizing case staffing to address noncompliant and sanctioned individuals. Case staffing will assist in timely identification of noncompliant individuals, or individuals who are in danger of falling into noncompliance.

All participants will be informed of the ability to be removed from sanctioned status by addressing issues of noncompliance.

A focus on integration of services county-wide will result in more referral sources for clients, and more efficient of accessing of services, across the board.

Sierra County Department of Social Services will be reviewing quarterly reports on noncompliant and sanctioned individuals, to assess gaps in identified need and available services. Identified gaps in resources will be designated as a priority in future plan amendments and development of community resources.

2. Anticipated Effects and Percentage of Families Affected Monthly

It is anticipated that the policies and strategies that will result in program improvement, as described in Section C, will positively impact all CalWORKS participants. New policies should decrease the sanction time for all sanctioned individuals, positively impacting approximately 12% of Sierra County WTW participants.

3. Assessment of Effects

Sierra County Department of Social Services will track the number of noncompliant and sanctioned individuals, weekly. Tracking of individuals will be incorporated into quarterly reports and the data will be utilized, as discussed in Section H.

F. OTHER ACTIVITIES DESIGNED TO INCREASE THE COUNTY'S FEDERAL WPR

1. Policies and Strategies That Will Result in Program Improvement

All social services staff involved in meeting state and federal requirements for Welfare to Work are participating in a series of on-site trainings, provided through a contract with The Center for Human Services, a UC Davis Extension program provided by the University of California. Training includes the following:

a. Effective strategies for addressing barriers to employment, such as substance abuse, mental health and domestic violence.
b. Assessing clients with a primary of goal of identifying and addressing barriers to employment.
c. Evidence-based practices.
d. Welfare to Work Regulations.
e. Trends in the Labor Market.

Agency-wide, evidence-based practices are being implemented in Sierra County Department of Human Services, which will significantly increase the ability of Sierra County to address barriers to employment.

2. Anticipated Effects and Percentage of Families Affected Monthly.

The implementation of evidence-based practice in assisting clients eligible for CalWORKs aid is expected to significantly increase the ability of Sierra County Integrated Case Workers and aid recipients in addressing potential barriers to employment. The reduction of barriers to employment is anticipated to impact a minimum of 35% of CalWORKs recipients, who experience verifiable barriers. Factoring in the potential to enhance the lives of individuals and families through a proactive approach, increases the number of families impacted to an estimated 45%.

3. Assessment of Effects

See Section H.

G. DESCRIPTION OF HOW THE COUNTY WILL COLLABORATE WITH LOCAL AGENCIES

1. Policies and Strategies That Will Result in Program Improvement

Sierra County Department of Human Services is entering into new dialogue with the local faith-based community, with a focus on addressing needs in the community collaboratively (i.e., client transportation needs, faith based counseling for clients who are involved with a faith).

Sierra County Department of Social Services is entering into new collaboration with the Alliance for Workforce Development, through planning with NoRTEC to implement and effectively utilize the Sierra Work Force Connection.

Other collaborations include provision of contracted GED services for CalWORKs clients, utilization of Sierra Safe and Victims Witness Assistance as a resource for clients who are involved in domestic violence, collaboration with local child care resources, and the local Family Resource Center.

Sierra County is initiating communication with regional Community Colleges, with primary focus on Feather River Community College, Sierra College and Truckee Community College, in the interest of enhancing options and opportunities for Sierra County CalWORKs recipients.

Sierra County Department of Social Services has been a leader in development of Integrated Services Workshops and collaborative efforts, throughout the county. The integrated services model involves all local community service agencies, with a focus on increased partnership with community-based organizations agencies.

2. Anticipated Effects and Percentage of Families Affected Monthly

Increased partnership with community based organizations and other county services will result in greater availability of services to clients. The greater range of choice in service availability is expected to impact 100% of CalWORKs clients. Expanding opportunities for clients is expected to assist in enhancing client level of hope and belief in positive possibilities for the future.

3. Assessment of Effects

See Section H.

3) PLAN TO MEASURE QUARTERLY PROGRESS

H. Plan to Measure Quarterly Progress

1. Measures of Quarterly Progress:

Quarterly reports will be reviewed by administrative staff and will assess the following factors:

a. The number of sanctioned individuals
b. The number of non-sanctioned individuals
c. The number of exempt individuals
d. Reasons for sanctions
e. Reasons for exemptions.
f. Length of time between initial contact and engagement in core activity.
g. The number of no-shows for orientation.
h. Follow-up outcomes for no-shows for orientation.

2. Projected Impact on County's Federal WPR

At the end of three years, it is anticipated that Sierra County will fully meet Federal Work Participation Requirements of 50% participation for all families and 90% participation for two-parent families. This represents a minimum of an 18% increase in participation rates, across the board.

This increase in participation rates is anticipated to progress as follows:

2007- 2008 – Implementation and expansion of programmatic changes as outlined above.
2008 –2009 – Eight percent increase in participation rates.
2009 -2010 - A minimum of an additional 10% in participation rates for a total minimum of 18% increase in participation rates.

Measures of quarterly progress will be used as a vehicle for ongoing identification of gaps in policies and procedures that may be negatively impacting the WPR.

4) FUNDING

Program Component	Fiscal Year 2005-06 Actual Expenditures	Fiscal Year 2006-07 Budgeted Amount	Description of how additional funding provided in Fiscal Year 2006-07 will be used
CalWORKS Eligibility Administration	142,482	139,419	The 2006-2007 budgeted amount has not been increased from the 2005-06 amount.
WTW Employment Services	181,559	266,889	Additional funds provided by the state for program improvement serve the function of enhancing program services through utilization of Integrated Case Workers, development of the Sierra Work Connection, and promotion of Integrated Services.
CalWORKS Child Care	77,300	74,449	The 2006-2007 budgeted amount has not been increased from the 2005-06 amount.
Cal-Learn	1501	1130	The 2006-2007 budgeted amount has not been increased from the 2005-06 amount.
CalWORKS Funded Mental Health Services	4482	4932	The 2006-2007 additional funds is used to provide additional mental health services for CalWORKS participants, including incorporation of a formal mental health assessment for individuals who are noncompliant with no discerned reason for non-compliance.
CalWORKS Funded Substance Abuse Services	2316	3042	The increase in funds goes towards substance abuse counseling services for CalWORKS participants. An improved referral and barrier identification process will likely result in an increase in referrals for substance abuse counseling services.

END