

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814



April 25, 2000

ALL-COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-43-00

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL WELFARE-TO-WORK COORDINATORS**REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL**

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

SUBJECT: ADVISORY WORKGROUP ON LEARNING DISABILITIES

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has established an Advisory Workgroup on Learning Disabilities to provide guidance and assistance regarding the improvement of services to learning-disabled California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) recipients. The workgroup consists of key representatives from state agencies, local county welfare organizations, legislative staff, and advocate groups that have an interest in assisting persons with learning disabilities attain self-sufficiency.

It is anticipated that the workgroup members will bring a broad range of knowledge and experience to assist CDSS in developing policies and procedures that can assist counties in identifying and evaluating learning-disabled CalWORKs recipients. In addition, the workgroup will examine alternatives, within existing State law and regulations governing CalWORKs, to remove barriers that prevent the learning-disabled from fully participating in the CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work program.

The workgroup held its first meeting in Sacramento on March 10, 2000. One of the first orders of business for this group was to develop a clear and workable definition of learning disability that would be applicable to the CalWORKs program. Accordingly, the workgroup reached consensus on a tentative definition that is largely modeled on the definition developed by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. For the purposes of the CalWORKs program:

Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. Even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (e.g. sensory impairment, mental); or environmental retardation, social and emotional disturbance influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient/inappropriate instruction, psychogenic factors), it is not the direct result of those conditions or influences. These disorders interfere with the participant's ability

to obtain or retain employment, maintain self-sufficiency or enter and participate in the CalWORKs program.

The workgroup members agreed to seek further input and comments from their respective organizations before finalizing the definition. Hopefully, at the workgroup's next meeting on May 5, 2000, a final definition of learning disability for the CalWORKs program will be agreed to.

In addition to finalizing the definition of learning disability, the workgroup will begin to identify screening and assessment tools that can be used to evaluate learning-disabled CalWORKs recipients. To date, the workgroup is aware of two states, Washington and Kansas, that are using screening tools on a large scale to identify learning disabilities among their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families clientele. The workgroup will be reviewing the tools used by these two states for their applicability to the CalWORKs population. We are also in the process of inviting a representative from the State of Washington to attend a future workgroup meeting to give a presentation about that state's learning-disabilities screening process. While the workgroup's review of screening tools will initially focus on those used by Washington and Kansas, it is open to examining additional screening instruments that may prove to be effective in assisting counties to meet the needs of their learning-disabled clients.

It is anticipated that the workgroup will continue to meet approximately every six weeks until December 2000, and we expect over this time that it will provide CDSS with recommendations on the following:

- 1) A definition of learning-disability applicable to CalWORKs recipients;
- 2) One or more screening instruments for early identification of learning-disabled CalWORKs recipients;
- 3) Methods for effectively evaluating learning-disabled CalWORKs recipients' skills and capabilities to participate in CalWORKs welfare-to-work activities, including employment;
- 4) Best practices, allowable within existing State law and regulations governing CalWORKs, to effectively link learning-disabled CalWORKs recipients to appropriate education, training, and employment services to ensure that they gain the skill needed to obtain and retain employment; and
- 5) A listing, by county, of agencies, education programs, and service providers that provide services to learning-disabled CalWORKs recipients.

Because this is such an important topic, CDSS will provide frequent updates and information about the advisory workgroup's progress and activities. The size of the workgroup must be limited to be effective, however, input and feedback is welcomed.

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Please contact Walter Johnson, Program Analyst, Employment Bureau, at (916) 657-5039, if you would like to provide comments or want additional information.

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By
Charr Lee Metsker on 4/25/00***

CHARR LEE METSKER, Chief
Employment and Eligibility Branch

c: CWDA
CSAC