

California deepens cuts to social safety net

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Cuts to social programs in California have deepened the distress felt by low-income families, as employment opportunities shrink and wages stagnate. The Democratic administration of Governor Jerry Brown is poised to inflict more severe austerity in the coming year.

Since 2008, California has made \$3.3 billion in cuts to Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS), the state-funded child care program for poor parents. This amounts to a cut of roughly \$3,000 for each of the 1.1 million children in the program.

Over the same period, legislators cut CalWORKS grants by 12 percent and denied cost-of-living adjustments twice. A family of three living in a high-cost county saw their maximum monthly grant of \$723 in 2007-2008 decline by \$85 a month, to \$638 in 2011-2012. The state also reduced the CalWORKS lifetime limit for adults from a maximum of five years to four years.

From 2009 to 2012, programs that helped children prepare for school or attend daycare while parents at work were cut by \$1.5 billion. In the last fiscal year, the state cut funding for preschool and daycare programs by 15 percent. The top income at which parents qualify to enroll their children in preschool was reduced from \$3,769 per month for a family of three, to \$3,518 per month. This move will eliminate state services for over 35,000 children in 2011-2012.

The state has also cut payments to unlicensed daycare providers, usually family relatives or friends who care for children while the parents are gone at work during night shifts or weekends. A “license-exempt” provider saw their monthly stipend fall from \$602 to \$482 starting July 11, a monthly drop of \$120. As a new study by the California Budget Project (CBP) noted, this will make it even more difficult for parents to find an affordable sitter while they work or look for work. (See “Study shows harmful impact of economic crisis

on California’s women”)

Medi-Cal, the state version of Medicaid, was cut by \$2.4 billion from 2008-2009 to 2011-2012. A number of services, including psychological care, podiatry, and dental care, were cut for adults, meaning they will have to pay out of pocket for these treatments or, more often than not, simply forego treatment. More than 7.7 million low-income Californians are served by Medi-Cal.

Perhaps most cruel are the cuts made to programs aiding the disabled and elderly populations. The CBP study reported that since 2008, \$4.6 billion in cuts have been made to programs that help low-income seniors and people with disabilities make ends meet. The maximum SSI/SSP grant fell from \$907 in February 2009 to the federal minimum of \$830 in July of 2011, a decline of \$77 per month. The federal government maintains that an elderly person living alone has to spend \$180 month on groceries to maintain an adequate diet. The cut of \$77 per month means that SSI/SSP recipients, who do not qualify for food stamps, will lose two weeks’ worth of groceries.

The In-Home Supportive Services Program (IHSS), which serves nearly 439,000 low-income seniors and those with disabilities, had their hours cut by the state legislature and governor by 3.6 percent. The governor’s automatic “trigger cuts” have targeted an additional 20 percent in hours, but a federal judge has temporarily blocked this pending litigation.

As atrocious as these cuts are, they are only a sign of things to come from Governor Brown, who has proposed \$10.3 billion in “solutions” to close a \$9.2 billion budget gap for fiscal year 2012-2013. This translates into deep cuts to health care, education, and childcare, which will account for \$2.5 billion of the \$4.2 billion in proposed cuts.

To help put these statistics in perspective, the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Molly, a single mother

with five kids aged eight, seven, six, four, and three months, who lives with her boyfriend and children in Long Beach, California. Molly originally came from Arizona, but moved to California recently for work and school. She has worked many jobs, including in sales, customer service, and caregiving.

On the job situation in Long Beach, she noted, “There are a few places, but you have to have education. They want you to have a high school diploma at Taco Bell.”

Molly described the ordeal she went through to get welfare assistance. “The bad part is having to wait in line and get treated like crap,” she said. “I don’t mind paperwork, but then I come in with my kids and they’re rude to me. They took away my food stamps for three months, and we were starving. They said we sent the application to the wrong person. It happens all the time.”

When asked how she survived those three months, she explained, “Family, friends, that’s it. I was pregnant. My boyfriend didn’t have a job, and he recently got laid off again.”

On her current welfare allotment, Molly commented, “They reduced my check by \$80. It doesn’t seem a lot, but it could pay a phone bill, or milk for my baby.”

When asked what she felt about the political situation in the United States, she said, “I voted for Obama, but I don’t think that vote counted. I feel this is a money-hungry world and no one takes care of you. What ticks me off is when they take away money from the schools.”

“I don’t trust the government,” she added. “I don’t want to be on welfare—I feel bad for people who pay taxes to support me. I want to better my life and my future for my kids.”



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