STATE OF CALIFORNIA HEALTH AND WELFARE AGENCY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

February 14, 1994

ALL COUNTY LETTER 94-11

Reason for this Transmittal
[ ] State Law Change
[ ] Federal Law Change
[X] Court Order or Settlement Agreement
[ ] Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
[ ] Initiated by CDSS

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: ANNUAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND BLANCO V. ANDERSON

REFERENCE: ACL NO 93-92

The purpose of this letter is to provide counties with instructions for implementing the federal regulation 7 CFR 272.4(g) which mandates an annual needs assessment of Food Stamp recipients who work and for implementing the requirements of the Blanco v. Anderson court order which concerns the closure of county welfare offices on regular work days.

7 CFR 272.4(g) requires, in pertinent part, that at least once annually, the local administering agency must review the hours of operation of Food Stamp offices to ensure that the needs of recipients who work are adequately met. This review must consider both certification and issuance offices. The results of these reviews must be retained at the State level for review by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

As explained in ACL 93-92 regarding the Blanco court case, Judge Shubb ruled that federal law was not violated by County Welfare Departments (CWDs) closures. Judge Shubb found that Congress intended to give latitude to local government agencies to set hours of operation since the local administrators are better able to determine the needs in their particular counties. However, the judge did enjoin the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) from permitting further weekday closures of Food Stamp offices until counties complied with the review requirements at 7 CFR 272.4(g).

The plaintiffs appealed Judge Shubb's ruling on January 12, 1994. However, until the Court of Appeals issues a decision on the appeal, Judge Shubb's Order is controlling.

All CWDs are required to conduct a review of the needs of working recipients to ensure the CWD's operational procedures adequately meet those needs. These reviews are to be forwarded to:

California Department of Social Services
Food Stamp Program Bureau
744 P Street, M.S. 14-52
Sacramento, CA 95814

Attn: Nancy Yee

The Needs Assessment and the Annual Review

To assist counties in completing a needs assessment designed to gather data on working recipients, we have developed the following suggestions which might be helpful:

- Data collection may be from existing management information systems available to CWDs.
- Working recipients and applicants may be polled at the CWD office.
- Data collection may be done through recipient surveys or questionnaires mailed to working recipients.
- Telephone surveys may be conducted.

You may elect to use one or more of these suggestions, but we wish to emphasize that you are <u>not</u> limited to these examples. A county may devise other methods which will be equally effective in gathering the necessary information. However, it is important that the information gathered adequately identifies the current needs of working recipients and is the basis for developing operational procedures.

The completed review should explain how the needs of working recipients were identified and how these needs were considered when establishing your county's operational procedures and hours. If client questionnaires or telephone contacts are used in completing an assessment, the recipient population sampled should be of an adequate size to be a reasonable representation of the working population.

If the assessment indicates that some working recipients cannot come into the welfare office during regular business hours because of their work hours, procedural alternatives should be offered. These may include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following:

- Recipients may mail required documents to the county.
- Drop boxes in which documents may be deposited after normal work hours may be established. The documents, when retrieved, would be date-stamped the prior work day.

- Telephone interviews may be conducted based on M.S. 63-300.43 and .44.

- Authorized representatives may be appointed who would be available to visit the county office during normal office hours.

- An office may offer extended office hours early in the morning or late in the evening. Lunch hour appointments also may be arranged.

State Action On Assessments

CDSS will review the CWD's assessment of the needs of working recipients and whether the results of the assessment are reflected in the county's operational procedures. If necessary, CDSS staff will contact CWDs to discuss any issues identified during the review. All counties will be notified of the results of the review.

Time Frames for Submittal of Assessment

The Department requests all assessment reviews be submitted within 60 days from the date of this letter.

Questions regarding the information in this letter should be directed to Nancy Yee, Food Stamp Policy Implementation Unit, the Food Stamp Program Bureau, at (916) 654-1896.

MICHAEL C. GENEST
Deputy Director
Welfare Programs Division