

INFORMATION ABOUT 2017 WILDFIRES

October 13, 2017

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: TODD BLAND, Deputy Director
Family Engagement and Empowerment Division

SUBJECT: CALIFORNIA WORK OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO
KIDS (CalWORKs) ELIGIBILITY FOR DISASTER VICTIMS AND
EVACUEES OF CALIFORNIA MAJOR WILDFIRES

The purpose of this letter is to remind counties of existing CalWORKs regulations and policy when processing applications or documents on behalf of wildfire victims and evacuees from the federally designated disaster and/or State declared emergency areas in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Solano, Sonoma and Yuba counties. The danger and damage caused by the major wildfires have made it necessary for some families to be evacuated from the county where they live.

Current recipients of CalWORKs are eligible for several waivers of existing rules, including the once every 12-month limit for Homeless Assistance (Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP Section 44-211.541(a)) and Welfare-to-Work requirements.

Additionally, due to the circumstances of the evacuees' departures and the devastation that occurred in their home counties, it is anticipated some evacuees will apply for CalWORKs in disaster counties or another county other than those in which they reside, due to disaster-related relocation. Many evacuees will lack documentation of various items (such as identification, age, social security number, value of property/resources, income, etc.) and may not be able to obtain such verification within standard application processing time periods. In order to promptly aid displaced families applying for CalWORKs, counties shall employ the following general guidance: If the applicant and county make a good-faith effort to obtain verification of the evacuee's identity, time on aid, and linking and non-linking conditions of CalWORKs

eligibility and are unable to make contact with the evacuee's financial institutions or other necessary entities/institutions, the county shall accept the evacuee's statements signed under penalty of perjury in lieu of such verification.

This ACWDL only covers the CalWORKs program. As a reminder, all applicants and recipients for CalWORKs who contact the county requesting CalWORKs aid shall be informed of their eligibility for CalFresh, replacement CalFresh benefits if they are an active CalFresh household that has experienced food loss, and Disaster CalFresh (D-CalFresh) during the application period for that program.

Processing Requests Made by Residents of Sonoma and Napa Counties

CWDs statewide will serve displaced families who have an active CalWORKs case in either Sonoma or Napa County, whether the family contacts them in person, by phone or online, in accordance with the following guidance:

- If a CWD receives a CalWORKs related request (e.g., replacement EBT card, replacement benefits, SAR 7 processing, etc.) from a family with an active case in **Sonoma County**, the CWD may contact 916-874-2200 Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm to reach a county worker who can assist and process the request.
- If a CWD receives a CalWORKs related request from a family with an active case in **Napa County**, the CWD will contact 510-374-4000 Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm to reach a county worker who can assist and process the request.

When a CWD calls these numbers to assist people with cases in Sonoma or Napa County, the CWD should provide a "warm handoff," meaning remain on the line with the family until the call is answered by the county worker, explain the family's situation and needs to the county worker, and ensure the county worker is able to handle the need. Once that has been established, the CWD may drop off the call and allow the family to speak directly with the county worker, or may remain on the line to assist (for example, if a replacement EBT card is needed, it may be easiest for all parties to remain on the line to ensure all needed information has been provided to print it in the location most convenient for the family). These calls are being routed to be answered quickly by a live agent able to assist with CalWORKs continuing case services.

Please note, any CWD statewide that receives a CalWORKs related request from a resident of Sonoma or Napa County will follow this guidance, regardless of the Statewide Automated Welfare System consortia of the CWD.

These procedures are intended to avoid a disruption in CalWORKs benefits for displaced families in need of cash assistance who may be temporarily residing in a number of communities across California.

CWDs who receive CalWORKs related requests from displaced families who have an active CalWORKs case in a county other than Sonoma or Napa -- for example, if displaced as a result of wildfires burning in other California counties -- will employ normal procedures to contact the county of residence and assist the client in resolving their request.

CWDs are highly encouraged to do everything possible to serve all displaced families in a timely and comprehensive manner.

When an individual or family displaced by the wildfires applies for CalWORKs, counties shall do the following:

- Establish the evacuee was living in a county designated as a federal disaster and/or State declared emergency zone as a result of the wildfires during the period the wildfires occurred; and
- Ask the evacuee if anyone in his/her family is currently receiving CalWORKs in that county, or from a disaster county.

Additional Information

Diversion Services

Counties are encouraged to explore CalWORKs Diversion eligibility for the wildfire evacuees. Diversion payments are designed to deal with a specific crisis situation or item of need, and may be appropriate for displaced families. Since Diversion payments are short-term, non-recurring benefits, they are not considered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) "assistance." As such, these evacuees who receive CalWORKs Diversion payments are not subject to federal requirements for individuals receiving TANF assistance including child support assignment and work requirements. However, these Diversion payments may impact evacuees' CalWORKs 48-month time limits per MPP Sections 42-302.22, 81-215.33, and 81-215.5. For more information about Diversion, please see ACL No. 97-68, ACL No. 98-37.

Treatment of Disaster Relief Payments and Assistance in CalWORKs

CalWORKs regulations exclude federal disaster and emergency assistance and comparable disaster assistance provided by the state, local governments, and disaster assistance organizations from consideration as income, property or resources (MPP Sections 44-111.61(i) and 42-213.515). Therefore, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) relief, American Red Cross relief, and D-CalFresh will not impact wildfire evacuees' eligibility for CalWORKs.

Determining CalWORKs Eligibility for Evacuees Not Currently Receiving CalWORKs

Evacuee applicants must meet all conditions of eligibility, including but not limited to deprivation, age, residency, immigration status, income, and property limits. However, given the circumstances of evacuees, counties should pay special attention to the following regulatory sections:

Homeless Assistance (MPP Section 44-211.5)

Many evacuees may be homeless, and should be informed of their option to apply for temporary and permanent housing assistance. Applicant families who have already received homeless assistance in the last 12 months are entitled to an exception to the once every 12-month limit, in accordance with MPP Section 44-211.541(a). In addition, counties are strongly encouraged to utilize additional programs like the Housing Support Program (HSP).

Immediate Need Payments (MPP Section 40-129)

These families are in an emergency situation, and should be evaluated for an immediate need payment. Pursuant to MPP Section 40-129.15, liquid resources mean items of value which are immediately available and reasonably convertible to cash in time to meet the emergency situation. Many evacuees will not have been able to convert resources to cash prior to or after their evacuation.

Residency (MPP Sections 40-189.1, 42-400, 42-401, 42-403.1, and 42-407.1)

The written statement of the applicant is acceptable to establish his/her intention to establish residency in California and in the county of application for the foreseeable future. For example, many evacuees may wish to eventually return to their home counties once it is allowable, safe, and feasible to do so, but are unlikely to know when (or if) that will occur. In these cases, neighboring counties should accept applications, carry the case if approved, and initiate inter-county transfers to the home disaster county if and when appropriate.

Income (MPP Section 44-101(a)(SAR)(AR/CO)

Reasonably anticipated income is defined as income expected to be available to or received by an applicant/recipient, and available to needy members of the family in meeting their needs during the Semi-Annual Reporting (SAR) or Annual Reporting/Child Only (AR/CO) Payment Period. It is expected that some evacuees, due to the disaster, will no longer have income that can be anticipated income.

Property/Resources (MPP Sections 42-201.1, 42-211.2, and 42-213.2) MPP Section 42-201.1 states that real and personal property shall be considered in determining eligibility for CalWORKs benefits when it is actually available to the applicant. Many evacuees will not be able to access, occupy, or sell their property at the time of application. The county shall take into consideration the applicant's ability and

circumstances in meeting the property provisions and shall make a good faith effort to assist the applicant to obtain needed verification or accept a statement signed under penalty of perjury.

Temporary Absence (MPP Section 82-812)

Counties are reminded to consult this regulation when determining deprivation and Assistance Unit composition since some families may have been temporarily separated during the evacuation, but anticipate being reunited in the near future. If an evacuee family member expects to reunite with the applicant family within one full calendar month, consider that member to be temporarily absent from his/her family.

CalWORKs evacuee recipients can maintain a home in a county different than the county where they are physically residing if they intend to return to that home within four months (MPP Section 40-189.21).

Welfare-to-Work Participation (MPP Sections 42-712 and 42-713)

Many families are in a state of crisis and will not be able to participate in Welfare-to-Work (WTW) activities. To ensure these families receive appropriate assistance, counties should make a WTW good cause exemption determination. This could be completed at the eligibility determination so that families are not needlessly required to attend a WTW orientation and appraisal. Because of the devastation caused by the wildfires, it may be difficult to verify some information for these determinations. Therefore, counties are encouraged to exercise flexibility in this regard. All good cause determinations or WTW exemptions must be made on a case-by-case basis. In addition, counties should determine if an applicant or recipient needs CalWORKs barrier removal services, such as mental health services, HSP or temporary homeless assistance, and counties should provide the services or refer the recipient to these services as expeditiously as possible.

Authorizing and Continuing CalWORKs Benefits

Current CalWORKs recipient cases that request homeless assistance can get an exception to the once every 12-month limit, in accordance with MPP Section 44-211.541(a). The effects of the fire are likely to continue in the coming months, even after the initial crisis subsides. Counties should remain diligent in serving evacuees to the fullest extent possible under the program.

Wildfire evacuees applying for, or receiving CalWORKs aid shall be informed of their reporting responsibilities under SAR or AR, as appropriate. Since it is anticipated many evacuees will have provided statements under penalty of perjury as verification of various conditions of eligibility, counties shall advise them to make every effort to obtain and provide documentation of factors impacting their eligibility during the payment period, and to seek assistance from the county if they need help in obtaining such documentation.

Flagging Evacuee Cases

Counties are asked to flag these evacuees' CalWORKs cases so that case data can be reported to CDSS upon request.

We have included a questions and answers attachment to further clarify these instructions. If you have any other questions regarding the contents of this letter, please contact the CalWORKs Eligibility Bureau at (916) 654-1322.

Thank you for your commitment to providing quality service to needy families during this difficult time.

Attachment

**California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)
Eligibility for Evacuees of Major Wildfires
Questions and Answers**

1. Will evacuees have to meet work requirements and will the months count against their clock?

If evacuees are eligible for CalWORKs cash aid (rather than CalWORKs Diversion), they are subject to work requirements and time limits. However, many evacuee families are in a state of crisis and will not be able to participate in welfare-to-work (WTW) activities. In these cases, counties should make a WTW good cause or exemption determination as appropriate.

2. Do we continue to follow normal regulations in regard to evacuees who are fleeing felons?

Yes. Evacuee applicants for CalWORKs must meet all conditions of eligibility.

3. We are seeing an influx of evacuees and need directions regarding verifications from clients (birth certificates, social security cards, etc.). How do we verify whether they are truly victims or can we just have them sign an affidavit?

If the applicant and county make a good-faith effort to obtain verification of the evacuee's identity, TANF eligibility, time on aid, and linking and non-linking conditions of CalWORKs eligibility, and are unable to make contact with the evacuee's financial institutions or any other entity/institution, the county shall accept the evacuee's statements signed under penalty of perjury in lieu of verification.

4. What do we do with evacuees who have lost their social security cards or do not know their Social Security Numbers?

As a condition of CalWORKs eligibility, applicants/recipients are required to submit SSNs. Individuals who are unable to furnish SSNs must apply to the Social Security Administration (SSA) to get a replacement card and supply verification of their completed application before aid may be authorized (Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) Section 40-105.2). However, if the applicant has made a good-faith effort to apply but is unable to quickly obtain verification of a completed application, the county shall temporarily accept the evacuee's statements regarding these facts signed under penalty of perjury.

5. Are homeless evacuee families subject to Semi-Annual/Annual Reporting (as appropriate) requirements for CalWORKs?

Yes, all AUs subject to Semi-Annual/Annual Reporting and are expected to file their reports in a timely manner. However, the good cause rules for late filed reports apply to reports filed late because of the disaster. For semi-annual reports, if the report is filed in the first month after it is due, the county must evaluate good cause for late filing and if good cause is found, the discontinuance for late filing is rescinded (MPP Section 40-125.94(SAR)). If the report is filed after the first month after it is due, the county must evaluate good cause on request of the parent, other caretaker relative, or an authorized representative (MPP Section 40-181.231(SAR)).

For annual redetermination, if the report is filed in the first month after it is due, the county must evaluate good cause for late filing upon the recipient's request (MPP Section 40-181.215(b)). If good cause is found, the discontinuance for late filing is rescinded. If the report is filed after the first month after it is due, the county must evaluate good cause upon request of the parent, other caretaker relative, or an authorized representative (MPP Section 40-181.216(a)).

6. Are evacuees subject to Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System (SFIS) requirements?

SFIS is a condition of CalWORKs eligibility for persons listed in MPP Section 40-105.32. However, an applicant shall not be required to go to a SFIS workstation site for the sole purpose of imaging. If any person required to be fingerprinted and photo imaged is not present at the county office during the intake interview process, they should be imaged when they come to the office for any other purpose or at SAR.