

**Senate Bill 1041 Implementation  
Field Monitoring  
Visit Summary**

**Merced County**

**Visit Date: November 6, 2013**

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
Welfare to Work Division  
Todd R. Bland, Deputy Director

**Merced County**  
Senate Bill (SB) 1041 Implementation  
Field Monitoring Visit Summary

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**Executive Summary**

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**Purpose of Field Monitoring Visit**

The purpose of the Senate Bill (SB) 1041 Implementation Field Monitoring Visit is to obtain information regarding the county's progress in implementing program changes enacted by SB 1041 (Chapter 47, Statutes of 2012).

**Scope of Field Monitoring Visit**

Specifically, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) will review how each County Welfare Department (CWD) implemented SB 1041 program changes, including but not limited to:

- New Welfare to Work (WTW) participation requirements;
- WTW 24-Month Time Clock;
- Reengagement of the former short-term young child exempt population (Assembly Bill [AB] X4 4 group);
- CWD staff knowledge of SB 1041 changes;
- Training provided to staff in order to implement these changes; and
- Any pertinent data related to these program changes that are available.

**Goals of Field Monitoring Visit**

The CDSS' goals are to ensure that SB 1041 is being implemented correctly by each CWD, to gather promising practices in regards to implementation, to share these promising practices (when able) amongst all CWDs throughout the state, and to determine whether systematic or program issues relating to the integration of SB 1041 changes into the existing California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) and WTW program exist throughout the state. If such issues exist, they will be addressed by the SB 1041 Oversight Workgroup.

**County Visit General Information**

The one-day field visit was performed in Merced County on Wednesday, November 6, 2013, at the Human Services Agency Main Campus in Merced, CA. The field visit team included one manager and three staff members from the CDSS, Welfare-to-Work Division, CalWORKs Employment and Eligibility Branch along with the Merced County Human Services Agency Deputy Director, Program Manager, and two additional county staff members. The field visit consisted of a kick-off meeting, close-out meeting, staff interviews, and case management observations with county staff.

**Implementation Strategies**

Merced County prepared for implementing the SB 1041 related program changes by analyzing All County Letters (ACLs) as they were published, attending County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) meetings and regional meetings to discuss changes and implementation strategies, training staff on new changes, and providing direction and guidance for implementation. SB 1041 implementation was introduced to staff on January 18, 2013 at a staff meeting. Tools were developed such as a checklist of the new program changes for staff to use in discussions with

clients and journal entry templates to ensure staff are covering the information at appropriate times. In addition, Merced County formed a reengagement team and hired three retired Employment & Training Workers to assist with the reengagement process.

### **Successes**

The organized manner of reengagement and sequencing groups in Merced County facilitated a smooth implementation process. The sequencing of groups began with those least likely to be reengaged. The county also established reengagement teams as part of their approach to streamline the reengagement process and included duties such as appropriate noticing, assignment of cases to case managers, scheduling appointments, reminder phone calls, and follow up on unresponsive/noncompliant cases.

Merced County provided thorough training to staff on the SB 1041 related program changes, and the county continues to update staff as new ACLs become available. Information and tools were also shared through emails, clarification/question and answer lists, online procedures, presentations, case scenarios, flow charts, checklist tools, journal templates, and other handout material. Merced County used lead staff members that were trained and well versed on ACLs relevant to their assigned area.

Cases reviewed demonstrated detailed case narration and documentation, including the Statewide Automated Welfare System Consortium-IV (C-IV) journal template used to ensure completion of thorough comprehensive discussions. Merced County's use of the Professional Development Plan (PDP) and Family Success Plan (FSP) in conjunction with the Welfare-to-Work Plan Activity Assignment (WTW 2) supports the development of a client's short- and long-term goals with a step-by-step plan of how to achieve those goals.

Merced County has a good relationship with the community colleges including staff located onsite that can assist with providing supportive services and attendance documentation. The availability of vocational education programs and adult basic education in Merced County is also a strength. The Read and Succeed-Merced English-based adult literacy program offered by the Merced County Library is a good resource for clients that need to improve their reading, writing, and numeracy skills. Merced County also offers fatherhood programs such as All Dads Matter boot camp for new dads as well as support programs for new mothers.

### **Key Recommendations**

Merced County should continue to work on establishing a new learning disability evaluation provider and may consider potential partnerships with other county agencies and/or available community resources. The county should also continue updating time limits to the correct Welfare Data Tracking Implementation Project (WDTIP) codes for those who were part of the reengagement process. Regarding utilization of the Your WTW 24-Month Time Clock (CW 2208) form, Merced County should ensure that all clients are receiving it as appropriate.

### **Acknowledgments**

The CDSS thanks the Human Services Agency in Merced County for hosting the field monitoring visit. The CDSS appreciates the open collaboration with CWD staff to ensure the continued success of the CalWORKs program.

## Field Monitoring Visit Summary

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### Introduction

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### Background and Data

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#### Merced At-a-glance

Total Caseload.....	<b>8,168</b>
<small>(Source: CalWORKs Cash Grant Caseload Movement Report CA 237 CW Line Item 8-July 2013)</small>	
WTW Enrollees.....	<b>2,948</b>
<small>(Source: CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Monthly Activity Report WTW 25/25A Line Item 1-July 2013)</small>	
Mandatory Participants (enrollees + sanctioned + non-compliance).....	<b>4,546</b>
<small>(Source: CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Monthly Activity Report WTW 25/25A Line Items 1, 3A, and 31-July 2013)</small>	

Reengagement Plan Received.....Yes  
Beginning Date of Reengagement.....January 17, 2013

**Data/Statistics:**

- Sanctions that were cured as a result of SB 1041: **1.**
- Former short-term young child exempt clients (Assembly Bill [AB] X4 4) that have been reengaged: **1,672.**
- WTW plans that have changed as a result of SB 1041 implementation: **1,765.**
- Clients that have used the new once in a lifetime young child exemption: **703.**

**Summary of Documents provided by Merced County:**

- Instructional announcements provided by the county to staff relevant to SB 1041 implementation.
- Informing notices and flyers provided to clients relevant to SB 1041 implementation.
- SB 1041 related training materials (formal and informal) including but not limited to training presentations, training practice scenarios, checklist tools, journal templates, flow charts, reference sheets, flyers provided to staff, and materials distributed during staff meetings.
- Merced County’s Reengagement Sequencing Plan.

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**County Administrator and Caseworker Interviews**

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The CDSS Field Monitoring Team used the county administrator and caseworker interview tools released in All County Information Notice I-42-13 to interview county administrators and caseworkers in-person regarding SB 1041 implementation. The tool was provided to the county administrators and caseworkers in advance of the visit. The administrator interview panel consisted of four CDSS staff with two county administrators. The caseworker interviews were conducted by four CDSS staff members with two caseworkers.

**Summary of Observations**

**WTW 24-Month Time Clock Implementation and New WTW Participation Requirements**

**For clients with Less than 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit**

The WTW 24-Month Time Clock General Informing Notice (CW 2205) was sent to clients on November 9, 2012, and November 10, 2012, by the Statewide Automated Welfare System Consortium-IV (C-IV). A letter was sent to all clients with less than 24 months on their CalWORKs 48-month time clock that informed them of the new WTW rules and encouraged them to contact their case manager in order to schedule an appointment to discuss the new rules. The case manager was able to discuss the new rules over the phone or schedule an in-person interview with the client. As clients are seen by case managers, the new rules are explained and the new WTW Plan Activity Assignment (WTW 2) and plans are signed.

Comprehensive discussions with clients with less than 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit began on January 18, 2013. At the time of the visit, approximately 700 clients appeared to have not had a comprehensive discussion; however, roughly 20 percent of this group did have a comprehensive discussion but did not sign a new WTW 2 form. The remaining clients of this group that have not yet had a comprehensive discussion have exemptions or good cause, and

Merced County's planned date for completion of comprehensive discussions for all clients is December 31, 2013.

The majority of clients are choosing to lower their participation hours for activities other than employment. Employed clients generally do not change their hours. Clients are also responding to the flexibility of the WTW 24-Month Time Clock and are focusing on adult basic education or completion of a general educational development (GED) upfront. They are also less likely to pair adult basic education with work experience. Merced County has noted a marked reduction in the number of clients who are participating in work experience and community service activities as a result. The county has noted fewer clients in core activities such as job placement skills.

**For clients with more than 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit**

Merced County began comprehensive discussions with clients with more than 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit on January 18, 2013. The planned date of completion for comprehensive discussions for clients with more than 24 months left on their CalWORKs 48-month time limit is December 31, 2013.

**Clients who failed to attend SB 1041 appointments**

Staff in Merced County have been very successful in connecting with clients for their comprehensive discussions. Active/mandatory clients that were participating were scheduled for an employment counselor meeting appointment to explain the new WTW 24-Month Time Clock and the new hourly participation requirements. If the client failed to attend the employment counselor meeting, the noncompliance process was initiated by sending a Notice of Action (NA 840) form, but the case manager did not proceed with a sanction. The client was also sent two WTW 24-Month Time Clock checklists and asked to read, sign one copy, and return in a self-addressed stamped envelope. The other copy was to be kept by the client for their records. For clients with less than 24 months on their clock, they are allowed to continue with their current activities if they are unresponsive to attempts to contact them. If a client was unsuccessful in their activity, the normal noncompliance process would be followed. Clients in good cause status for lack of transportation who were not able to attend an employment counselor meeting appointment were not sanctioned and the WTW 24-Month Time Clock was not started.

**General Comments**

*Merced County's strategy for completing all necessary comprehensive discussions was to begin with all active/mandatory, good cause, and noncompliance cases. Beginning in March 2013, case managers were to begin scheduling these clients for an in-person employment counselor meeting to inform them of the program changes. Supervisors and case managers used lists of cases by category (e.g., active, noncompliant, etc.) to track completion of comprehensive discussions within their caseloads. Supervisors were responsible for monitoring staff progress on comprehensive discussions and appropriate timeframes for noticing. The WTW 24-Month Time Clock checklist and insert for the WTW Handbook were tools used to complete the comprehensive discussions.*

*Merced County generated an ad hoc report to determine if there were sanctions that could be removed due to the change in required hours of participation, and found one case that was updated. At the time of the visit, no additional outreach to partially participating*

*sanctioned clients had occurred. Merced County has concentrated their efforts on having the comprehensive discussions and on completing the reengagement process. All sanctioned clients will receive a comprehensive discussion by the end of December 2013.*

*An alternate form to the Your WTW 24-Month Time Clock Informing Notice (CW 2208) was used that combines the information from the CW 2205 and the CW 2208 (referred to as the "half sheet"). The half sheet was also sent to clients that were contacted for their comprehensive discussions but were unresponsive. Merced County staff utilized a journal template to ensure completion of thorough comprehensive discussions as well as to document the discussion, and includes time remaining for the client on both the WTW 24-Month Time Clock and the CalWORKs 48-month time limit. The Professional Development Plan (PDP) is used along with the WTW plan and was updated to include the WTW 24-Month Time Clock information so that the client will receive this information any time they sign or amend their WTW plan.*

*Strategies used by staff to complete all comprehensive discussions with their clients included printing the workload inventory page in the C-IV system, scheduling employment counselor meeting appointments, mailing the CalWORKs Exemption Request (CW 2186A) form with the appointment letter, preparing the WTW 24-Month Time Clock checklist, ensuring the new program information insert is attached to the WTW 2, reviewing the checklist and WTW handbook at the employment counselor meeting with the client, signing a new WTW 2 and PDP, and starting the WTW 24-Month Time Clock if appropriate.*

*During the employment counselor meeting, county staff discussed weekly participation requirements, changes to core/noncore hours, how the client's choice of activity may affect his or her WTW 24-Month Time Clock, and how cash aid may be lowered if the client is not meeting core participation hours once his or her WTW 24-Month Time Clock has expired. Discussions at these meetings also explained the different types of exemptions, including the once in a lifetime young child exemption, care of a first child exemption, and subsequent child exemptions. County staff discussed the option of using the care of a first child exemption, if eligible, instead of the young child exemption if the client is planning on expanding their family. The WTW Handbook was reviewed and the WTW 24-Month Time Clock checklist was used to ensure all information was adequately covered. County staff noted that clients are motivated by the lowered hours and elimination of core/non-core activities, especially clients in community college and vocational education.*

*A typical case manager in Merced County carries roughly 135 cases. One case manager had completed all comprehensive discussions for clients in her caseload, and noted that 38 clients opted to use the new young child exemption, two clients opted not to use it, and two clients chose the exemption based on the care of a child that does not stop their WTW 24-Month Time Clock. Clients in Merced County who are participating in a self-initiated program (SIP) are opting to reduce their hours by dropping a second activity if it is no longer needed to meet their lower weekly participation requirement of 20, 30, or 35 hours. Employed clients are not opting to reduce their hours typically because they do not want to reduce their income and prefer continue working their currently scheduled hours.*

*Case managers feel that clients understand the new program changes. Clients in Merced County attend a WTW orientation that reviews the WTW 24-Month Time Clock and the available activities. Following the orientation, an appraisal is conducted during which the WTW Handbook and time limits are reviewed, a WTW 24-Month Time Clock checklist is utilized, and all client questions are addressed. The appraisal appointment typically lasts one and a half to two and a half hours. Clients are asked about their employment and family goals during the appraisal interview. Case managers review the Family Success Plan (FSP) with clients to identify strengths and possible barriers. The case manager will help the client strategize how to reach their goals. For example, if a client's goal is to participate in vocational education, but needs to improve their Tests for Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores to become eligible, the case manager may suggest participating in adult basic education activities. Clients that are participating in job skills placement or work experience may be encouraged to meet core hours so their WTW 24-Month Time Clock does not tick. Case managers utilize the C-IV system functionality to document a client's short term, long term, and employment goals. The PDP is also used to develop a client's goals and to outline each step needed to achieve the identified goals.*

*Merced County has a good relationship with the community colleges and has two staff onsite that can assist with providing supportive services and attendance documentation. The Merced County Library's Read and Succeed-Merced English-based adult literacy program is a good resource for clients that need to improve their reading, writing, and numeracy skills. The program begins with an initial assessment to determine the client's current level. Retired teachers conduct one-on-one tutoring for those at a 6.9 reading level or below. Merced County also offers fatherhood programs such as the All Dads Matter boot camp for new dads as well as support programs for new mothers.*

### **New Young Child Exemption**

The majority of eligible clients in Merced County are choosing to take the new young child exemption. In a two-parent household, both parents are required to be informed about the new young child exemption and are responsible for discussing it among themselves prior to selecting which client will be exempt.

### **General Comments**

*Merced County noted that the new young child exemption has helped to keep active caseloads down. The new young child exemption was challenging for county staff because unlike the previous short-term exemptions that were automatically granted if a client was eligible, the client may choose to take or not take the new young child exemption. This became difficult when a client was likely eligible for the exemption but was unresponsive. In this situation, county staff would attempt to discuss the client's option to take the exemption at the sanction (NA 840) appointment, at a home call, and by phone. Some clients are choosing the care of a first child exemption.*

### **Clients with Good Cause for Lack of Supportive Services**

Merced County informed clients with the CalWORKs 48-month time limit exemption due to good cause for lack of supportive services that their time limit exemption would end and their 48-month time clock would restart in February 2013. A one-on-one meeting was scheduled with these



clients to explain the WTW 24-Month Time Clock and CalWORKs 48-month time limit changes, review any exemption options that may be available to them, as well as have the comprehensive discussion. If a client was not qualified for an exemption, the WTW 2 was signed for an appropriate activity.

### **The new WTW Plan Activity Assignment (WTW 2)**

Merced County has been using the new WTW 2 since it became available in the C-IV system in March 2013. Prior to the availability of the new form, Merced County staff used the current WTW 2 in the C-IV system, but specified additional verbiage that was added in the comments section.

#### **General Comments**

*Merced County felt the new WTW 2 form was challenging to utilize and explain to clients, specifically the verbiage at the bottom of the form about how many hours are required. Staff found the new WTW 2 to be complicated, long, cumbersome, and not very user friendly. Staff felt it was confusing to determine which side of the form to fill out, what boxes to check, how many hours to include, etc. County staff found the new WTW 2 was confusing to fill out for an employed client also doing an adult basic education activity, and how to use the new WTW 2 for a client in a SIP. Staff found the new WTW 2 has positive additions such as the more detailed supportive services section where clients initial whether they have requested or denied services, and includes the domestic abuse and mental health activities and services available to the client. Clients like the detail and thoroughness of the new WTW 2 because it clearly shows what they are initialing and to what they are agreeing with no gray areas of confusion. Supervisors perform reviews of WTW 2s to make sure they are being completed correctly.*

*Because staff need to count months in vocational training prior to January 1, 2013, it required additional staff time in researching the case to determine how many months may be left before the client would begin to use their WTW 24-Month Time Clock. Staff would prefer that clients have to attend for 35 hours during the initial job club. By reducing the hours, it was difficult to provide clients with the same level of knowledge prior to their job search. Clients were told that they could participate for the full time and that child care costs would be covered; however, the majority continued to participate only the minimum number of hours required.*

*When completing the new WTW 2 for a SIP, the case manager marks the SIP check box. The case manager will determine how many months of vocational education have been used to identify which side of the WTW 2 should be used to list the activity. The vocational education page in the C-IV system is reviewed to see the months already used. If it is an inter-county transfer case, the inter-county transfer liaison is contacted to check if months were previously used in another county. If the client has been in a SIP for 12 months or longer, the left side of the WTW 2 is used. If the client is new or has used less than 12 months, the right side of the form is used.*

*County management is concerned with the time it will take to determine if the client met California program requirements and federal work participation rate (WPR) requirements. County management felt that instead of aligning requirements closer to federal guidelines,*

*the recent program changes are moving them further apart. With the state tracking weekly hours of participation and the monthly tracking of hours for federal purposes, two calculations will be necessary to determine if the WTW 24-Month Clock ticks and whether or not federal WPR requirements are met. In addition, by lowering the hours clients are required to participate, they are less likely to meet federal WPR requirements. Prior to the new legislative changes, activities in Merced County included a few additional hours per week in order to provide a cushion for when a client had a slight gap in activities or missed a few hours or day of their activity. Because of the wording of the new WTW 2 form, these additional hours are no longer an option. In Merced County's experience since January 2013, clients do not seem inclined to do any more hours than the minimum, and this is true even with the county's most motivating activity, job club. Clients are made aware that they can participate for the entire day, but they continue to go home when their 20 or 30 hours are up. The county anticipates that clients who meet the weekly hours required for CalWORKs federal guidelines will not meet the federal WPR requirement for at least six months every year due to these changes.*

*County staff also noted that receiving verification of hours worked from employers is difficult because many are not willing to provide it and clients don't want employers to know that they are on aid.*

### **Reengagement Process**

Merced County's reengagement process officially began on January 17, 2013. The Young Child Exemption Ends December 31, 2012 – New Rules for CalWORKs WTW Activities (CW 2206) mass mailer was sent on January 17, 2013 to the first four groups listed in their reengagement sequencing plan (see below). The fifth group received the notification in May 2013. The date that reengagement began indicates the date that each group began their reengagement evaluations following the notification requirements as specified in All County Letter (ACL) 13-01. Merced County management considered the pros and cons for engaging each population and determined the sequence. The first group included the populations that were anticipated to be the least likely to reengage. Orientations were scheduled for those sanctioned prior to the short-term exemptions. This group was followed by those anticipated to be the most likely to reengage, including volunteers and those reporting earnings. The next group focused on clients with older children as child care was less likely to be an issue. The fourth group involved the clients with young children. Many of them were likely to be eligible for the new young child exemption and likely to choose to continue to be exempt. The last group was clients with limited English language abilities. Engaging this group last provided more time to expand the services available for this population.

Merced County's Sequencing Plan is as follows:

- **April 4, 2013**-Clients in sanctioned status prior to the short-term exemptions.
- **April 8, 2013**-Clients volunteering and clients that are reporting earnings.
- **May 13, 2013**-Clients with a child(ren) age two and older.
- **June 3, 2013**-Clients with a child(ren) under the age of two.
- **August 12, 2013**-Monolingual clients (limited English language ability).

Merced County began WTW orientation appointments in April 2013. Volunteers, monolingual, and fulltime employed clients were scheduled to meet one-on-one with their current case manager. An upfront orientation was followed by a one-on-one appraisal appointment for the rest of the clients. The orientation covered WTW program requirements, the WTW 24-Month Time Clock, the CalWORKs 48-month time limit, participation hours, the ability to volunteer for additional hours, available activities, development of the PDP, counseling services, child care, transportation, ancillary, exemptions, sanctions, the WTW Plan Rights and Responsibilities (WTW 1), the WTW Handbook, the FSP, and the WTW 24-Month Time Clock checklist. Past work history is discussed, family and employment goals are identified, and the PDP is reviewed. Based on this information, the case manager will help guide the client regarding what is needed to reach the goal and how to support the client. Clients were seen immediately following the orientation, with few exceptions, by a case manager. The case manager worked with the client to determine activities and exemptions as appropriate and to sign any applicable WTW 2 plans.

Reengagement of short-term exempt clients was conducted as their group was scheduled in sequence. This allowed clients to remain exempt so months did not tick towards their CalWORKs 48-month time limit until they were reengaged. All short-term exemption cases were transferred from the case manager into a county-designed sequenced caseload.

Merced County allows all clients to reengage upon request ahead of their reengagement sequencing process. When a client wishes to reengage prior to the sequencing plan, they are allowed to volunteer until they receive the reengagement notice and remain in the exemption status during this time. In situations where it is more advantageous for the client to reengage rather than volunteer, the lead staff member meets with the client and goes over the new program changes including the WTW 24-Month Time Clock. The client is then able to make an informed choice as to whether to reengage or remain in exempt status until their reengagement notice. If a client in the reengagement population was already volunteering, they were allowed to continue with their current activity in their WTW plan until they were noticed for reengagement. For clients not volunteering prior to January 1, 2013, they were allowed to begin volunteering unless it was more advantageous to the client to reengage. Because the volunteers were engaged early in the reengagement sequence, their WTW plans were updated prior to July 1, 2013.

Merced County used Reengagement Teams as part of their approach to streamlining the reengagement process. Reengagement team duties included the following tasks:

- Sending out packets 30 days in advance with appointment letters;
- Assigning cases to case managers once the client shows for the WTW orientation appointment;
- Scheduling reengagement appointments on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 10:00-11:30 am and 2:00-3:30 pm;
- Scheduling WTW orientation appointments on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00-2:00, and Fridays from 9:00-10:00 am;
- Reminder phone calls;
- Scheduling NA 840 appointments for Fridays from 10:00-11:30 am; and
- Following noncompliant cases to sanction.

### ***General Comments***

*Merced County put a great deal of thought into their reengagement process to make it most beneficial for clients. Merced County's approach was to start by appraising most clients since many had been exempt for a long time and there were so many programmatic changes to discuss. Those volunteering were already assigned to activities, so these clients were allowed to continue with their current participation and added additional hours and activities as appropriate. The case manager was able to determine which avenue to assist the client with, such as eligibility for another exemption, job club, mental health services, vocational training, or a SIP.*

*Merced County staff felt that the reengagement process was working well and have been able to quickly adjust as challenges occur. County staff assisting with reengagement specifically took care of noticing clients and scheduling appointments. The county was also able to streamline the process in order to reach clients sooner and is nearing completion of the reengagement process.*

*Merced County staff found the multiple notices to clients to be cumbersome and hindered the ability to get clients in quickly and engage them in appropriate activities. County staff also felt it was difficult to explain to the client the options surrounding reengaging earlier than their sequence and often opted to have them volunteer until their sequence came up unless there was a reason why it would be more beneficial for the client to reengage earlier. In this situation, a lead staff member was asked to assist the case manager in having the conversation with the client about the pros and cons of doing so.*

*Merced County management and staff felt it was a struggle to separate the reengagement process and the changes to the WTW 24-Month Time Clock and CalWORKs 48-month time limit and explained that they sometimes had to pause in their thought process to determine if they were discussing reengagement, the new time clock, or both. The short-term exemption clients were confused about the WTW 24-Month Time Clock and CalWORKs 48-month time limit, and some clients thought the WTW 24-Month Time Clock was an extension of the CalWORKs 48-month time limit. Case managers worked with clients to help them understand that the clocks may or may not run concurrently.*

*Merced County staff began reengagement for four sanctioned cases on April 12, 2013, 136 exempt volunteer cases on April 16, 2013, 75 exempt cases with income on April 23, 2013, 163 cases with a child age two or older on May 13, 2013, 441 cases with children over the age of two on June 3, 2013, and 54 monolingual cases on August 12, 2013. At the time of the visit, the Los Banos office had completed the reengagement process.*

*Volunteer cases remained with the case manager and the reengagement team scheduled the appointment for the case managers beginning April 16, 2013. The case manager was responsible for scheduling NA 840 appointments and following through with the noncompliance process if the client fails to attend the appointment. If a client requested to change his or her volunteer hours to the new reduced hours, the case manager would meet with the client, reduce the hours, and maintain the client's volunteer status. The majority of the volunteering clients were already doing less than the required hours so most did not*

*request to have their hours changed. If a client requested to volunteer, the case manager met with him or her to discuss the activities the client was interested in attending, and was allowed to continue to volunteer until the client was scheduled for reengagement.*

*County staff felt the reengagement process was working smoothly and kept clients informed at every step of the process. A few clients were sanctioned for not attending their reengagement appointment and being unresponsive, but some clients are still filtering in and case managers are reengaging them one-on-one. County staff noted that clients seem more motivated by the lowered hourly requirement and elimination of core/non-core activities and feel the changes have been beneficial.*

### **Implementation Strategies**

Merced County prepared for implementing the SB 1041 related program changes by doing the following:

- Researching the legislation and reading information provided by the CDSS;
- Analyzing ACLs as they were published;
- Sending out notices per ACLs;
- Attending County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) meetings and regional meetings to discuss changes and implementation strategies;
- Preparing preliminary Gantt charts for how reengagement would be addressed;
- Informing staff of potential changes;
- Training staff on the changes and providing direction and guidance for implementation;
- Determining staff needs and forming a reengagement team;
- Hiring three retired Employment & Training Workers for extra help to assist with reengagement;
- Developing tracking devices to assure that clients were noticed per regulation timeframes;
- Determining the groups for the reengagement sequence;
- Working with contracted service providers and adapting service when able;
- Involving internal partners in discussions and programmatic decision making;
- Preparing a plan to utilize the facilities available for added workshops and orientations;
- Ordering supplies and equipment to meet additional workshop needs;
- Updating the WTW handbook, job club curriculum, and other materials to correctly reflect the changes;
- Translating the job club curriculum into Spanish in order to provide job readiness in a group setting;
- Determining verbiage for WTW 2 forms and other client correspondence;
- Developing a checklist of the new program changes for staff to use in their discussions with clients; and
- Developing journal entry templates to ensure staff are covering the information at appropriate times.

Merced County provided training to staff on the new WTW 24-Month Time Clock, new WTW participation requirements, reengagement, the new young child exemption, and the new WTW 2. As new ACLs or clarification on existing ACLs become available, the county continues to update their staff. Training has been provided at Employment Services Branch (ESB) staff meetings with

follow-up at individual team meetings. In addition, information has been disseminated via email, questions and answers lists, and updated procedures have been posted online for easy reference. SB 1041 implementation was introduced on January 18, 2013, at the ESB staff meeting. Training also included initial appraisal discussion points, a flow chart, and sample case processing scenarios. Training was presented via PowerPoint presentations and handout material. During an additional staff meeting, the WTW 24-Month Time Clock was introduced and training provided. This training included a checklist that was created to review with clients during an initial appraisal and/or the CW 2186A was reviewed and questions were answered regarding the form. Samples of the new CalWORKs Exemption Determination (CW 2186B) were reviewed but instruction given not to generate the form until it was available in the C-IV system. On March 15, 2013, training was provided on the new WTW 2 form. The training included page by page review of the new form with comparison made to the old form.

Additional changes that were made the support the transfer of learning including clarification emails with questions and answers sent to all staff and posted online for future reference. The C-IV journal templates were updated to include the new young child exemption information. An insert with all the program changes noted was created and attached to the WTW Handbook. Supervisors have an open door policy for questions that occur during client interviews.

At the time of the visit, Merced County was still in the process of training staff on counting months toward the WTW 24-Month Time Clock and have sent questions forward through the CalWORKs County Advisory Team (CAT). Merced County is currently in the process of updating time limits to the correct Welfare Data Tracking Implementation Project (WDTIP) codes for those who were part of the reengagement process.

ACLs were available online to all county staff members. Lead staff members were involved in trainings and were well versed on the ACLs relevant to their assigned lead area. Supervisors shared either the actual ACLs or information from the ACLs with their team during team meetings. Additional information on program changes was provided during monthly staff meetings. To ensure staff understood the changes, the supervisors monitored their progress through interview observations and targeted case reviews. The county is currently in the process of revising their online employee procedures in order to reflect the changes.

### **General Comments**

*Merced County developed their own training material and did not use the CDSS Training Aid. County staff discussed the new program changes including the WTW 24-Month Time Clock and any relevant exemptions with clients. Staff were informed of the elimination of core/noncore hours of participation in specified activities at the state level while understanding the potential impact on the federal WPR. Staff were encouraged to help clients make an informed decision and to determine what was the best plan for each client. County staff recognized that the WTW 24-Month Time Clock rules provide more flexibility for clients to attend activities of their choice. Staff were kept informed as additional services became available to clients, such as the expansion of hours clients could attend adult basic education through Merced County's contracted service provider, Merced Adult School, since core requirements have changed.*

*Another challenge for Merced County's implementation was that staff had been on furlough for some time and returned to find several ACLs had been issued during that time period.*

*Merced County held group orientation for sanctioned clients and also conducted home calls to see if any barriers to attending and participating could be identified and resolved.*

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## **Case Reviews**

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The CDSS Field Monitoring Team reviewed five cases selected by the CWD in advance of the visit. The purpose of this component of the visit is to review how SB 1041 program changes are being integrated into case management, understand how SB 1041 policies are being operationalized by the caseworker, and better comprehend case management within the county.

There were five specific case types requested:

- Case One-a client with **less than or equal to** 24-months left on the CalWORKs 48-month time limit as of January 1, 2013;
- Case Two-a client with **more than** 24-months on the CalWORKs 48-month time limit as of January 1, 2013;
- Case Three-a new client (beginning date of aid January 1, 2013 or later);
- Case Four-a client who is sanctioned that has earnings and is curable based on the new participation requirements (may be a case actually cured since January 1, 2013 based on new participation requirements); and
- Case Five-a client that is part of the former short-term young child exemption (AB X4 4)/reengagement population, and is currently in the process of or has been reengaged.

### **General Comments**

*Merced County uses the C-IV case management system. The following is a summary of the case findings:*

- *All clients received the CW 2205 in November 2012. An alternative form to the CW 2208 was used and issued to all clients.*
- *Comprehensive discussions were being completed and noted within case files and the new WTW 2 was being used and kept on file. Short and long term goals were reflected in the cases.*
- *One client was reengaged and opted to take advantage of the new lower hourly requirement for an adult with a child under six years of age by participating in job readiness for 20 hours per week.*
- *Supportive services offered and/or issued were being documented in case files.*
- *One client cured a sanction due to earnings identified by county eligibility staff.*
- *A learning disability screening was offered and waived or declined by all cases. At the time of the visit, a learning disability evaluation was not immediately available and the county was working to resolve the issue.*
- *One client was eligible for the new young child exemption and opted to use it.*

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## **Conclusion**

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### **Successes**

The organized manner of reengagement and sequencing groups in Merced County facilitated a smooth implementation process. The sequencing of groups began with those least likely to be reengaged. Contacting previously sanctioned cases first in the sequence order was a promising practice for Merced County. The county also established reengagement teams as part of their approach to streamline the reengagement process and included duties such as appropriate noticing, assignment of cases to case managers, scheduling appointments, reminder phone calls, and follow up on unresponsive/noncompliant cases.

Cases reviewed demonstrated detailed case narration and documentation, including the C-IV journal template used to ensure completion of thorough comprehensive discussions. Merced County's use of the PDP and FSP in conjunction with the WTW 2 supports the development of a client's short- and long-term goals with a step-by-step plan of how to achieve those goals. County staff noted that clients like the detail and thoroughness of the new WTW 2 because it clearly shows what they are initialing and agreeing to with no gray areas of confusion. The WTW 24-Month Time Clock checklist and insert for the WTW Handbook were used as tools to facilitate comprehensive discussions and ensure client understanding.

Merced County has a good relationship with the community colleges including staff located onsite that can assist with providing supportive services and attendance documentation. The availability of vocational education programs and adult basic education in Merced County is also a strength. The Read and Succeed-Merced English-based adult literacy program offered by the Merced County Library is a good resource for clients that need to improve their reading, writing, and numeracy skills. Merced County also offers fatherhood programs such as All Dads Matter boot camp for new dads as well as support programs for new mothers.

Merced County provided thorough training to staff on the SB 1041 related program changes, and the county continues to update staff as new ACLs become available. Trainings given at ESB staff meetings were followed up with individual team meetings. Information and tools were also shared through emails, clarification/question and answer lists, procedures posted online, presentations, case scenarios, flow charts, checklist tools, journal templates, and other handout material. Merced County used lead staff members that were trained and well versed on ACLs relevant to their assigned area.

### **Challenges**

Merced County found it was difficult to implement the new program changes within the given timeframe. Internal restructuring changes, administration changes, and staff furloughs also created challenges during implementation. The first training on the new program changes was delayed until January 18, 2013 after the furloughs were concluded.

### **Key Recommendations**

Merced County should continue to work on establishing a new learning disability evaluation provider and may consider potential partnerships with other county agencies and/or other



resources available in the community. The county should also continue updating time limits to the correct WDTIP codes for those who were part of the reengagement process. Regarding utilization of the CW 2208 form, Merced County should ensure that all clients are receiving it as appropriate.

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**Contact**

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