

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Coalition of Northern California Organizations Urge HHS
to Adopt Welfare Policies that Reduce Poverty, Not Caseloads**

When: Tuesday December 4th, 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Where: 455 Golden Gate, Suite 2000 in San Francisco

Individuals will be available for comment on location beginning at 9 AM

On Tuesday, December 4th a coalition of legal, employment and welfare organizations -- including more than a dozen welfare recipients -- plan to give the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services an earful at the Administration's second "listening session" on welfare reauthorization.

The purpose of the meeting is to solicit suggestions from individuals and organizations regarding the family public assistance program, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF. The message that advocates what the government to hear? "Focus on reducing poverty and giving parents access to stable employment to support their families."

This open-comment town hall meeting follows a series of invitation-only "listening sessions" held by HHS around the country, which drew protests from several Bay Area organizations for their failure to include community members, advocates and welfare recipients themselves.

Consequently, the Administration opened subsequent listening sessions in New York, Atlanta, and Dallas, Texas to the public, and convened this second San Francisco listening session to give individuals and organizations the chance to be heard.

At the December 4th meeting, the organizations listed above will be urging the Administration to adopt changes to the federal welfare law that will truly serve to move families out of poverty:

- **Reduce poverty, not caseloads.** HHS should fulfill the original goal of the TANF law by adopting policies that move families into economic self-sufficiency, rather than moving families into dead-end, low-wage jobs.
- **Remove barriers to success for TANF recipients.** In both design and implementation, TANF programs present many barriers to welfare recipients, including time limits, sanctions, access to education and training, and discrimination.

Although the welfare rolls have dropped dramatically nationwide, poverty has remained high among former welfare recipients. "Most families leaving welfare earn less than \$7 an hour or annual earnings of \$13,650, far below what it would take to meet the TANF goal of ending dependency on government supports," said Tse Ming Tam of Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency and the National Economic Development & Law Center.

One way to achieve economic self-sufficiency is through greater access to education, a policy proposal supported by many state and national organizations, including Low-Income Families Empowerment Through Education (LIFETIME) and the Coalition for Ethical Welfare Reform (CEWR). Diana Spatz of LIFETIME remarked, "Education and training is the most effective way

California Welfare Justice Coalition • Coalition for Ethical Welfare Reform • Grassroots Organizing for Welfare Leadership (GROWL) • The Law Center for Families • The Legal Aid Society – Employment Law Center • Low-Income Families Empowerment Through Education (LIFETIME) • The National Economic Development & Law Center/Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency • The National Housing Law Project

to help parents get off welfare – and out of poverty -- for good. It’s an investment in poor families with lasting results.” Martina Gillis of CEWR said, “Education works because it can move people off welfare for the long term, out of poverty and into jobs that can truly support families.”

Internal barriers within welfare programs exist, as states struggle to provide appropriate services to disabled recipients and those who do not speak English proficiently. “Studies across the nation show that families getting cut off from aid as a penalty for not following the rules are disproportionate for those with significant disabilities. Many did not understand what they were supposed to do or why their aid got cut,” said Jodie Berger of the Welfare-to-Work Advocacy Project at the Legal Aid Society – Employment Law Center. “Other studies show that limited English speaking participants are not benefiting equally as English speaking TANF participants because of language and cultural barriers,” according to Luz Buitrago of the Law Center for Families in Oakland. “Unfortunately, this is the case despite legal obligations requiring the provision of language accessible services. We are encouraging HHS to make clear how states can use federal funds to meet these legal obligations.”

Finally, there must be stronger collaboration between HHS and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which must be further translated into coordination at the local level. "For example, last year, approximately 350,000 families participating in the traditional Section 8 voucher program nationwide received some TANF income," said Lynn Martinez of the National Housing Law Project. "These families are permitted to move anywhere to access jobs. Local TANF and Housing Agencies should be working together, but often are not, to provide mobility information and counseling to support these families.”

To address these concerns, these organizations urge HHS to adopt policies such as use of the Self-Sufficiency Standard to measure welfare reform’s success; increased access to education and training; removal of time limits for families “playing by the rules,” such as those working or in training programs; better access to disability, language and ESL services within TANF; mandating better-coordinated services between HUD and HHS for TANF recipients who are currently working; and ending discriminatory practices, among others.

For Further Comment:

- Education and Training Issues: Diana Spatz, LIFETIME: 510-452-5192 or 510-872-4475; Martina Gillis, Coalition for Ethical Welfare Reform: 415-822-6316
- Economic Self-Sufficiency Issues: Tse Ming Tam, National Economic Development & Law Center/Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency: 510-251-2600
- Disability Issues: Jodie Berger, Legal Aid Society - Employment Law Center: 415-864-8848
- Discrimination Issues and National Welfare Grassroots Organizing: Kendra Fox-Davis, Center for Third World Organizing: 510-533-7583
- Housing Issues: Lynn Martinez, National Housing Law Project: 510-251-9400 ext. 110
- Language Issues: Luz Buitrago, The Law Center for Families: 510-451-9261 ext 208