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STATEMENT OF

LEON L. WILLIAMS, CHAIRMAN
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

ON BEHALF OF

THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 26, 1990

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Leon Williams. I am the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors for the County of San Diego. It is my pleasure to welcome you to San Diego County. I very much appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the County of San Diego regarding the implementation of the Family Support Act of 1988.

The County of San Diego is very proud of the leadership role we have played in the development of welfare reform work programs at both the local and the national levels. Since 1979, our pioneering efforts have demonstrated that it is in fact possible to operate cost-effective employment programs for public assistance recipients. National demonstration projects conducted in San Diego County, such as the Food Stamp Workfare Project, the Employment Preparation Program, and the Saturation Work Initiative Model, proved the value of substantial initial investments in order to achieve, significant long-term gains in reducing welfare dependency. Moreover, evaluations of these projects indicated that government and the tax payers benefitted along with the programs' participants. To a large extent, San Diego's unprecedented success has led to the establishment of California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program in 1985 and, more recently, the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program on a national scale.

Since October, 1987 when GAIN was implemented in San Diego County, nearly 30,000 recipients have been enrolled into the program, and more than 18,000 participants have entered employment. Implementing and operating such a large and complex program has been challenging, but has provided us with some valuable lessons. Chief among these is the critical importance of interagency coordination and cooperation. We are fortunate in San Diego to have a community of public agencies and educational institutions who share with us a high level of commitment to the philosophy and goals of the GAIN program. We also share a firm belief that, together, we can overcome bureaucratic obstacles and make GAIN succeed. Collaborative efforts involving the State Employment Development Department, the Private Industry Council, several high school and community college districts, the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency and County Department of Social Services GAIN staff have provided a unique cooperative utilization of community resources. This partnership is characterized by commitment at the highest levels within each agency and a shared willingness to develop and maintain workable linkages.

We have also experienced a growing recognition of the important role that self-esteem plays in determining both individual and overall success. We are finding ways to include activities that

increase self-esteem into every GAIN component. It is only by directly attacking the problem of low self-esteem among welfare recipients that we can assist those individuals to overcome their fear of failures, their hopelessness and dependency.

Another lesson emerging from our experience with GAIN is the value of prevention programs which provide early, positive interventions in the lives of young welfare recipients. GAIN staff working closely with school districts and local adolescent parent projects conduct outreach activities and provide a comprehensive range of services for pregnant and parenting teen recipients. Our goal is to encourage teens to stay in or re-enter high school, develop strong parenting skills, and to break the cycle of poverty, before it becomes fully established in their young lives. To date, 406 teen recipients have enrolled in the GAIN Teen Parent Project.

Despite our accomplishments and the valuable experience we have acquired, we must realize that the task of achieving true welfare reform is not completed.

Much remains to be done to reverse the trend of increasing welfare dependency. The implementation of the JOBS program has elevated this issue on the nation's agenda and has extended challenges and opportunities to every level of government. A primary challenge involves the level of investment we are willing to devote to welfare reform to achieve our long-term goals. Demonstration projects in San Diego have validated the direct relationship between program success and funding levels. Because the federal government stands to gain the most from successful welfare reform, we must look to the federal government for the substantial, up-front investment required to achieve meaningful and lasting reductions in welfare dependency.

We must also continue to recognize opportunities to refine our national welfare reform efforts. There is still a significant lack of coordination and conformity between programs that serve similar clients, such as AFDC and Food Stamps. The differences between JOBS and the Food Stamp Employment and Training program constitute a prime example of this lack of coordination. The overlap between these programs should be eliminated, and their requirements should be parallel. Clients would receive better service, and all levels of government would benefit from administrative savings.

Child care is a critical factor influencing the effectiveness and ultimate success of the JOBS program throughout the nation. Studies have shown that child care is the third largest expense for those living below the poverty line. Yet the development of child care resources lags far behind the rapid increase in demand. Although we have not yet had to deny GAIN services to a large number of participants due to a lack of child care resources, the growing shortage of child care openings in the county may soon restrict our ability to serve everyone we otherwise could. The County of San Diego urges Congress to pursue legislation to establish a comprehensive national child care policy which will improve the quality of child care, provide for development of new child care resources, and enhance the accessibility of child care, especially to disadvantaged families.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide comment on behalf of the County of San Diego.