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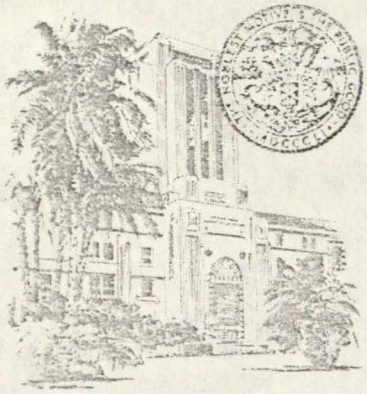

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SERVICE AUTHORITY FOR FREEWAY EMERGENCIES

August 10, 1990

The Honorable George Deukmejian
Governor of the State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Deukmejian:

I read with interest your July 27, 1990 California Commentary in the Los Angeles Times titled "Clear Away Obstacles to Workfare." It proposes some basic changes to the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program designed to transform GAIN "into a true 'workfare' program where the immediate priority is to remove people from welfare rolls and put them on payrolls as quickly as possible." You suggest that this transformation could be accomplished by shifting the initial focus of the program from basic education services to an extensive job search component. Also proposed are measures designed to tighten up alleged lax participation requirements and liberal vocational education and training policies.

While I agree completely with your stated goals of promoting self-sufficiency and reducing welfare dependency, I must respectfully disagree with your plan to accomplish these goals. I am also concerned that some of the information you received regarding GAIN may be either inaccurate or incomplete and may have adversely colored your assessment of GAIN. The attached document details my specific concerns.

After nearly three years of operating GAIN in San Diego County, we have witnessed the significant, positive impacts that GAIN education services have had on thousands of participants and their families. I believe it would be remiss to implement measures resulting in limited short-term savings at the expense of far greater long term benefits.

Sincerely,

Leon Williams

LEON L. WILLIAMS, Chairman
Board of Supervisors

LLW/kah

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ATTACHMENT

GAIN EDUCATION SERVICES

1. **For many jobless welfare recipients, the GAIN education component offers a crucial second chance to obtain the essential basic education or high school diploma that was missed in their youth.** Significantly, GAIN enrollees are reaching their educational goals in an average time of four months. GAIN provides a real opportunity for welfare recipients, mostly single mothers, to escape the bonds of ignorance and despair, to expand their horizons, and to envision a future for themselves and their families that is free of poverty.

2. **The proposal would force GAIN participants who lack basic reading and math skills, a high school diploma, or proficiency in the English language to spend six weeks in an intensive job search activity before receiving GAIN education services.** Further, these individuals would be required to accept any job that pays at least minimum wage, regardless of the chance for career advancement. Please note that families would still be able to receive supplemental welfare payments if wages are not sufficient to support the family. The basic contradiction here is that this approach will serve to keep people on the welfare rolls while in dead-end, low paying jobs with little hope of attaining self-sufficiency. Our decade of experience operating work/welfare programs clearly indicates that few people lacking basic educational skills can successfully compete in the labor market and become independent of welfare. It is also unrealistic to expect that many single mothers managing families while working full-time at a minimum wage job will find the resources and the energy to pursue basic education programs on their own.

3. **It is implied that some of the 60% of GAIN registrants who need basic education would prefer to work but are forced to attend school instead of seeking employment.** However, GAIN regulations have always provided enrollees with the option of Job Search activities before remedial education classes. The fact that most such participants choose education ahead of Job Search validates the idea that individuals lacking basic education skills are aware that they are ill equipped to compete in today's labor market.

4. **The commentary references the example of a former welfare recipient who benefitted from GAIN services and discovered that "You do not have to be a prisoner to welfare."** This testimony was from a former San Diego GAIN participant who came to the program lacking education, self-esteem and hope. Her complete testimony provides an insight into the importance of education services. In her own words, "You become afraid and ... you enclose yourself in your home and you stay there and you do not venture out. You teach your children to be the same way. You get an attitude that society is against you. Through the GAIN program, all of this ignorance goes away. You become educated and you realize that ... you do not have to accept poverty. You can succeed."

This mother of three attended a GAIN Learning Center, completed her high school education, attended Job Club and became employed. Today she is earning $19,000 per year, is attending college, and is totally free of welfare. Where would she be today if she had accepted a minimum wage job before the education service? Again, in her own words, "I would be on welfare." For this individual and for thousands like her, education is the key that unlocks the prison door. For taxpayers, the long term benefits of assisting families to become completely self-sufficient far outweigh the short-term results this proposal seeks to achieve.

5. I concur with the proposal to stop subsidizing college and graduate school programs. GAIN regulations have been too lax in this area, but they are already changing for the better to more fiscally responsible policies included in law and regulations proposed under AB 312. GAIN participants will not be allowed to pursue post-secondary education or training if they already possess marketable job skills. Moreover, policies concerning the types of programs that may be approved are being tightened up to focus more directly on vocational programs leading to demand occupations in the labor market.

6. The proposal to strengthen the requirements for mandatory participation in GAIN is in direct contradiction to the reductions in the GAIN budget. While recently implemented federal regulations have significantly increased the pool of mandatory GAIN participants, adopted funding reductions will greatly restrict the program's ability to enroll everyone. Thousands of mandatory GAIN participants in California will go unserved this year and in the foreseeable future. Federal guidelines mandate that priority for services be given to specific target groups determined to be hardest to serve and most in need. These target groups include long-term welfare recipients and teen parents. Participation will be mandatory for these groups. However there seems to be little point in strengthening mandatory participation requirements for large groups of recipients we cannot afford to serve.

7. An emphasized and expanded GAIN Job Search component is not the panacea for California's growing welfare problem, especially if it occurs at the expense of education services. While shifting the up front focus of GAIN to an extensive Job Search component may well produce an initial increase in the number of welfare recipients getting jobs, those recipients in low paying jobs are likely to remain recipients. A few short-term dollars may be saved at the expense of single parents who will be prisoners of welfare and of dead-end jobs that they cannot quit without risking their welfare benefits. The State of California has invested substantial resources in an extensive evaluation of the GAIN program. I believe the findings of the evaluation will include positive impacts and long-term benefits for the GAIN education component. I suggest that we wait until this evaluation is published and the impacts of the education component are known before we revise the most ambitious and comprehensive and perhaps, best designed welfare reform program in our nation's history.

8. What is needed instead is a broader, more comprehensive approach to attack the welfare problem with a range of services designed to overcome multiple barriers. Neither GAIN nor the entire welfare system can solve the problem alone. We must join forces with other public agencies and the private sector in a collaborative effort to produce a service delivery system that can set cooperative priorities, share information, avoid duplication and provide an appropriate and effective mix of services at the right places and at the right times. The system must attack immediate problems such as hunger, homelessness, and joblessness, as well as pervasive symptoms and by-products such as child abuse, ignorance and despair. An example of just such a system, New Beginnings, involves the cooperative actions of the City and County of San Diego, the San Diego Unified School District and the San Diego Community College District. L.A. Times staff writer David Smollar referred to New Beginnings as "an audacious and complex effort to redirect the existing welfare bureaucracies to improve the lives of students and their families beginning with a City Heights neighborhood."

A key element of such a cooperative service delivery system is education. In San Diego County, we have learned that the beneficial impacts of GAIN education services far exceed participants' improved grasp of the ABC's. For many, being dependent on welfare is far more than simply being unemployed. Dependency can be a form of addiction that cannot simply be treated by six weeks of job search. Giving people an opportunity to make up for what they failed to take advantage of, for whatever reason, in their earlier years does more than make them better prepared to take on the challenges faced by today's competitive and increasingly technical work force. Remedial education and/or obtaining a high school diploma involves gradual but steady progress towards a much needed series of small, but vitally important, successes that re-establish a sense of confidence, worth and self-esteem, without which progress toward self-sufficiency is highly unlikely.

9. There are clear indications that the lack of self-worth and self-esteem are major contributing factors to child abuse and neglect. We continuously hear participants say that their enrollment in the GAIN education component is having profound positive impacts on their children's performance in school and attitude towards education. Therefore, GAIN as an important human capital investment program serves to effectively help prevent today's children from becoming tomorrow's drop-outs, welfare dependents and child abusers. It is clearly time that we start to focus on prevention and stop devoting so many of our resources to treating problems that might have been prevented in the first place.