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### THE BOTTOM LINE: THE GOVERNOR'S WELFARE REFORM PROPOSAL

It is time to look at the real bottom line in welfare reform: Almost 70 percent of California welfare recipients are children. These children -- whose parents already are challenged providing basic food, shelter and clothing -- face the real bottom line every single day of their lives. The problem with Governor Pete Wilson's 1997-98 welfare reform proposal -- far more stringent than federal law requires -- is that it perpetuates the stereotype of adult welfare recipients who would rather watch television than work, while ignoring the fact that most California welfare recipients are children.

Current California grant levels already have been reduced 25 percent from 1991-1995 for a family of three, and now amount to less than 70 percent of the federal poverty line. The Governor's plan reduces grants by an additional 15 percent after just six months on aid, if adults in the family are not working. His proposal also limits new recipients of aid to one year of assistance in any two-year period and current recipients of aid to two years in any three-year period (both with a lifetime limit of five years). Yet there is no concrete plan for job creation for those recipients, and California has consistently failed to apply for, and match, millions of federal dollars available for job training programs.

California officials project 330,000 new jobs in 1997. Yet even if parents currently receiving state aid captured every single one of those new jobs (an impossibility), less than one-half of them would be employed next year. What will happen to the children in those families now receiving a combined AFDC/food stamps grant of about \$850 per month (for a family of three), and left with nothing but \$250 per month in food stamps benefits?

California's Director of Social Services Eloise Anderson has offered her answer: child abuse authorities will place children facing malnourishment into foster care. This flies in the face of current law, which states only "unfit" parents suffer child removal -- and it would take substantial malnutrition to make that removal possible. With over 90,000 California children now in foster care, in a system that by any standard is far from perfect -- are we now really willing to add over a million more children? No wonder the Governor states that welfare recipients should be offered every assistance in placing their children for adoption, giving them a "home and opportunity which otherwise cannot be offered."

All because their parents cannot find work, even if they comply with all of the other new requirements. Where does that leave the children, who through no fault of their own suddenly face homelessness? There is an alternative which will realize many of the objectives of so-called welfare reform, and without abandoning children. If parents receiving aid make a bona fide attempt to find work, and if they are unable to secure a position by the end of the time limit, give those families -- in addition to food stamps benefits -- rent vouchers at the median rent for an apartment, until work is found or a public service job is provided.

The Governor's budget bill proposal exacts its toll on the most vulnerable among us, our children. Unless we look at the real bottom line, and unless the public dialogue focuses where it belongs -- on the children who will be denied even the most basic subsistence level now offered on welfare -- we are all hypocrites.

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