

SECOND START BOARD MEETING
SEPTEMBER 24, 1996
"WELFARE REFORM"

It is my pleasure to be invited to speak to your Board this evening. As many of you know, I am Santa Clara County Supervisor Jim Beall. I am also heading up Santa Clara County's welfare reform effort.

I was asked to speak tonight about "welfare reform" and its impacts on our community.

As you well know, unprecedented changes are re-shaping the nation's welfare system. 60 years of FDR's aid program has been dismantled in one huge blow with the recent passage of the Welfare Reform Bill.

- Aid to Families with Dependent Children is gone.
- The JOBS program, known in California as GAIN, will be severely impacted.
- Organizations like Second Start that provide job training will also face serious consequences.

I can't emphasize enough the fact that **the need for food stamps, cash aid and medi-cal services still exists while simultaneously these programs are being slashed and eliminated.** Most of the users of these programs are people often referred to as our future -- KIDS.

In addition, simply forcing people into the workforce without providing the appropriate training, education, and retention services is not a solution to permanently removing people from welfare.

The welfare reform bill disregards the need to give people a "hand-up". In California the welfare reform bill is simply a "hand-off" to local governments.

The impact on California will be like no other. California is the only state in the union in which counties are responsible for 100 % of the costs for providing General Assistance, a state mandated local program that provides the indigent with aid.

We can't shut the doors of our public hospital nor turn our backs on those who need food and shelter here in the streets of Santa Clara County,

therefore, we must continue to maintain the safety net. In Santa Clara County it will be the local taxpayers who will bear the brunt of the shifted costs.

Without careful, concerned, sensitive deliberation to create a welfare program that works and treats those in need humanely, society will pay anyway. Hospitals, jails, courts, and the entire criminal justice system will become overloaded.

It is literally the health of our community and the future of this Valley that is being sacrificed with this new Welfare Reform bill. We are denying kids - food, shelter, and clothing. Ultimately, those who are denied aid will end up homeless --either in shelters or other unstable housing, without food, without access to jobs and job training. This is not a "hand-up" opportunity.

The reality of the situation is that most of the people impacted are children, seniors and the disabled. Of the 158,000 aid recipients in Santa Clara County --20 % will immediately not qualify for aid as of January 1, 1997.

In addition, if only 10,000 recipients shift to the county funded General Assistance Program at a cost of \$200.00 per person, the cost impact will be \$24 million to the county. Realize that the average welfare recipient receives approximately \$600 per month and that is being decreased to \$200.

Every effort that we have made to reduce our local caseload and use our local economic boom will be negated.

The light at the end of the Tunnel:

The energy in the community and the minds of the people who have been seeking solutions for this massive problem on the "Re-thinking Public Assistance" task force headed by myself and Supervisor Alvarado has been outstanding.

The goal of the Task Force initially was to influence the legislation that was being crafted -- needless to say that was unsuccessful.

Now we have made it our mission to

- involve ourselves in the process at the state level,
- demand that unfunded mandates not be implemented and focus on harnessing the energy of the local community to help get us through the “state of devastation”,
- and educate the community about the impact of this legislation as it pertains to health, crime, homelessness and the quality of life

We are taking the following steps to address this issue:

- Working with Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren, who is working diligently to help us at the federal level,
- Working with county staff, community-based organizations and volunteers to help 17,000 people who are legally residing in this county to become citizens, making them eligible for aid and members of the voting population
- Utilizing the web of people who work diligently to maintain the safety net and our local resources to get people into permanent jobs.

I’d like to say a word about **Betty Siemer** and her participation in this effort. Betty has been a leader in the effort to involve non-County representation in our initiative. Betty brought Second Start and other service providers to the table for their valuable input on what exactly non-profits can offer, and what successful methods you currently employ to train individuals. Betty has also headed up our “Client Services” workgroup, single-handedly bringing a number of former and current recipients into our process. These individuals bring to our effort a wealth of experience and advice, without which our ultimate product would surely fail. Without Betty’s leadership and participation, our initiative would be missing a major source of information and inspiration!

The Reality

Although this is a complex political issue, turning our backs on the repercussions is morally wrong.

I am committed to go to Sacramento to convince the legislature to work with counties on a meaningful welfare program as soon as possible.

Meanwhile I will continue my local efforts to transition these individuals into jobs, citizenship and housing.

Welfare reform must not shut people out but rather put all able bodied people to work, provide job training that moves people off of welfare to meet the demands of the business community and provide child care so that working mothers can be fully employed.

We've all read the kudos claimed by Congress for achieving welfare reform. The fact is that they did not seize the opportunity to enact true welfare reform. As a result we will use our leadership to join hands locally with other counties to implement a welfare system that will put people back to work so that California as a whole may emerge a better place for all of its residents.

Thank you.

Q&A?