



February 20, 2002

For more information: Eva De Luna-Castro, deluna.castro@cppp.org

No. 151

DHS SEEKING COMMENTS ON TEXAS WORKS

On February 6, the Department of Human Services held a public hearing on the 2004-2005 budget needs of the Texas Works program. Interested advocates can find out more about this hearing in this brief Policy Page, which also contains information about how to submit written comments on Texas Works needs by February 25, 2002.

WHAT TEXAS WORKS INCLUDES

"Texas Works" is the state's welfare-to-work program, implemented by the Department of Human Services (DHS) in November 1997. In the agency's budget documents, most of the Texas Works initiatives are found in the Client Self-Support Eligibility function, which includes eligibility determination and other services for recipients of Food Stamps, cash assistance, Medicaid, and other "safety net" programs. The primary goal of Texas works is to foster client self-sufficiency.

At the February 6 hearing, DHS officials said they were specifically seeking input on how to encourage client self-sufficiency through adequate and equitable access; how to focus on hard-to-serve clients; how to meet a greater percent of the financial need of families on TANF; and how to help clients cope with time limits on receipt of cash assistance. In addition, the new DHS Commissioner, Jim Hine, has operational goals for the agency and its programs that include simplifying the process of applying for Food Stamps, TANF, and Medicaid; ensuring access to health care; streamlining agency operations; and improving customer service. Another area in which DHS is seeking public comments revolves around federal reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Food Stamps (see <http://www.cppp.org/reauth/> for more information.) The goal here is to implement initiatives that better prepare Texas for possible federal changes such as

- **TANF:** revised work requirements and ways of calculating participation rates, bonuses or credits to states for employment outcomes (rather than caseload reductions); supplemental funding; contingency funds;
- **Food Stamps:** simplification of the assets test; realignment of Food Stamps as a transitional benefit for those leaving cash assistance caseloads; serving elderly and disabled clients; non-U.S.-citizen eligibility; the Quality Control process; and other administrative process improvements.

Later in February, DHS will have a similar hearing on its long-term care programs (client services and care facility regulatory activities). To read CPPP's press release on DHS' Texas Families in Transition study, visit <http://www.cppp.org/products/media/pressreleases/PR-TFIT.html>

STATE/HHS BUDGET CONTEXT

The February 6 hearing began with a comment by DHS officials that the state's fiscal situation for 2004-05 is already a cause for concern and that efforts are already underway to save state General Revenue dollars. First, a January 15, 2002 memo from the Governor's budget office instructed all state agencies to "hold down spending and identify potential savings options" and report on their findings by March 15. In addition, state health and human service agencies were asked to report to the Health and Human Services Commission on what effect a 1%, 2%, and 3% reduction in General Revenue would have on their budgets for the last quarter of 2002 and all of fiscal 2003. CPPP recommends that advocates with suggestions on improving the Texas Works program be aware of these fiscal constraints when making comments, but should not necessarily rule out anything that would require additional funding (state or federal).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Written comments on ways to improve Texas Works may be submitted during the public comment period, which ends February 25, 2002. Comments can be mailed to Texas Department of Human Services, Eric McDaniel, Mail Code W-312, P.O. Box 149030, Austin, Texas 78714-9030, or submitted to eric.mcdaniel@dhs.state.tx.us. More information: call Eric McDaniel, (512) 438- 2909.

You are encouraged to copy and distribute
this edition of
THE POLICY PAGE