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Commission on
State Mandates

California Association of Supervisors
of Child Welfare and Attendance

www.cascwa.org

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Mr. Drew Bohan, Executive Director
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**RE: Claim # 01-PGA-06, 09-PGA-06 (4487)
Habitual Truant**

Dear Mr. Bohan:

I write on behalf of the California Association of Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance (CASCWA) to express our concern over the recommendation being considered regarding the education mandate reimbursement for the *Habitual Truants* program. The importance of the policy and ideology that are the basis of this program cannot be stressed enough. The habitual truancy mandate requires school districts to take several steps which help to identify habitually truant students, and inform parents of their child's truancy. These are critical steps in preventing students from dropping out of school and these steps are also critical components to maintain the continuation of both the School Attendance Review Team (SART) and School Attendance review Board (SARB) processes.

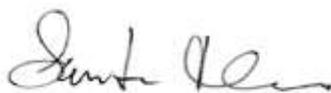
Our more general concerns have to do with the lack of understanding that exist for why school districts are appropriately allowed to make claims against the state in the first place, and how the constitutional requirement was envisioned to limit the overall burdens placed on school districts. Schools simply want to have current mandates fairly reimbursed in a timelier, less bureaucratic formula. Restructuring the current process is in the best interest of the students, as well as the state given that reimbursement goes into resources to serve families directly. Currently, there are four reimbursable activities that are included in the habitual truant mandate. The first part of the process is for school districts to identify students that have been truant at least four times during the school year. Once a student is identified in this way, a school district must make a conscientious effort to schedule a conference with the parent or guardian of the student. After a school district has made an effort to schedule a conference, and the parents/guardians agree to confer, they must schedule and hold a conference. The last step is for the district to reclassify the student as a habitual truant. All of these steps are crucial in trying to prevent habitual truancy and its subsequent consequences.

Our research tells us that the bulk of the mandated cost claims filed by school districts result from scheduling and holding a conference. The state has a significant interest in requiring local agencies to meet directly with the parents or guardians of students who are habitually truants. There is substantial evidence that students who are habitually truant perform poorly in school and are likely to drop out. A reasonable reimbursement unit cost for supporting face-to-face conferences between school staff and the parents/guardians of students who are seriously at risk would make the process more effective. We completely and wholly support the policy behind all of these steps, and stress the importance that they remain as they are.

The State Controller's Office and the Department of Finance have pointed out that the costs incurred in performing the activities required under this mandate vary widely across school districts. Accordingly, it would make sense to amend or change the current claim process. There have been attempts in the legislature this year to get us to that end and it would appear reform is on its way. Mandate claim reform is clearly something that should be addressed. We strongly support the idea of streamlining the claiming process and having a reasonable reimbursement unit rate when appropriate. However, we strongly believe that these issues must be discussed before a proper policy committee rather than risking the creation of larger problems for schools beyond the fiscal challenges they currently face.

I can be reached at 916.669.5425 or via email at sandram@sia-us.com should you need additional information.

Sincerely,



Sandra S. Morales, Legislative Advocate
School Innovations and Advocacy

cc: CASCWA Executive Board