



State needs more work, less welfare

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Recent stories by staff writers Shea Johnson and Mike Lamb paint disturbing portraits of the High Desert and San Bernardino County: Rampant welfare fraud, surging poverty, nonprofits pushed to their limits to try to provide food, clothing and shelter for an ever-increasing segment of society.

We are heartened that the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors acted on Johnson's investigation into welfare fraud and voted recently to "develop and improve" policies to increase the referral rate and prosecution rate for those who commit this crime that victimizes every single county taxpayer.

We also praise the dedication and devotion of numerous nonprofits in Barstow, the Victor Valley and San Bernardino County that help the enormous number of poor (as much as 60 percent of the population in Barstow receive some type of government assistance) in our midst.

But even more troubling than the large numbers of poor in the county is the lack of understanding among state lawmakers of how they exacerbate the problem.

Take welfare. In California, the pre-tax equivalent for welfare recipients is \$37,160 or \$17.87 per hour, according to the Cato Institute's 2013 *The Work vs. Welfare Trade-off*. The Golden State spent \$36.6 billion on welfare, tops in the U.S. The total welfare spending by all 50 states was \$462.2 billion.

Obviously, when government provides welfare recipients with enough money that living on the dole becomes better paying than getting a job, you've got a problem. You have effectively eliminated the incentive for poor people to try to better themselves.

By making it easier to accept welfare than to get a job, you've created a dependent class that likely will remain that way until and unless government policies are changed and force them to seek employment.

On top of that, California bestows government aid and "rights" on illegal immigrants — everything from driver's licenses and free public education, to free healthcare and in-state tuition at our state colleges and universities.

Add it together and nearly 40 percent of Californians live in or near the poverty level. That sounds disturbingly high, but remember, poverty pays pretty well in California. There are housing subsidies, free food, earned income tax credits and more. And that doesn't count all the freebies nonprofits provide.

It's time for state lawmakers to acknowledge the problems that exist and take steps to correct them. We don't want millions of poor people in this country, but we also don't want to see a permanent "entitled" class that does nothing but accept handouts. America was built on self-sufficiency and hard work. It's time to encourage more of that and less welfare.