STATEWIDE AUTOMATED WELFARE SYSTEM (SAWS): IS IT READY?
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I was excited about my internship in Napa County, because I would gain first hand knowledge of the Statewide Automated Welfare System (SAWS) developed in and by Napa county. I heard rumors that SAWS is slow and uses clumsy technology that doesn't fit the way we work in San Francisco. Experienced San Francisco intake workers can typically put a Food Stamp application online in less than five minutes. The generic SAWS automated application interview, eligibility determination and benefit computation can take between thirty minutes and ninety minutes. I am aware that SAWS actually makes the eligibility determination, a clear advantage over CDS but my primary concern is the impact of replacing our rapid and CDS with SAWS. If the rumors about SAWS are true, it may be a step back for San. Francisco and other CDS users.

Highly critical audit of SAWS:

From the San Francisco Chronicle, April 19, 1995 quoting the California State Auditor General: " .... the (SAWS) project has been mismanaged by the Department of Social Services. The system used outdated technology that is available only from one company and may ultimately cost more than $1 billion..." This article appeared as I completed a two-week internship in Napa County, sponsored by the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC). These internships are intended to increase managerial awareness of the operations of other Bay Area social services departments. My focus was the current Interim SAWS (ISAWS) system, originally NAPAS, designed in Napa ,County. I observed Napa's management and staff using SAWS in the day-to-day activities of their department. My prior experience with welfare automation was with the Case Data System (CDS) as a worker and supervisor in Alameda County. In San Francisco, I coordinated implementation of the Automated Finger Image Reporting and Match (AFIRM) in San Francisco.

San Francisco's informal position on SAWS:

Prior to reporting to Napa, I spoke with San Francisco managers about the future of SAWS. Overall, their comments were skeptical and ranged from: "If SAWS gets here, it'll really change the way we do business, as you have to do generic eligibility.." to "the state doesn't know what they're doing ...." and "SAWS is great for counties that had manual systems, as any automation is a step up.." The general consensus is that the state is having real difficulty with the project as local implementation of SAWS keep getting delayed. More importantly, our department functions effectively with CDS, a transaction based welfare system operated by a consortium of 19 counties and Electronic Data Systems (EDS).

The General Assistance Issue:

Perhaps the strongest criticism of SAWS voiced in San Francisco is the failure of the state to address automation of General Assistance (GA) eligibility determination and/or benefit delivery. General Assistance is a significant factor in San Francisco with over 14,000 GA cases. Other urban CDS counties also have GA costs that are a major portion of their general fund expenditures. Consequently, monitoring and controlling the GA caseload is of primary concern.

Implementing a SAWS system that doesn't have GA capability means SFDSS must operate two computer systems. This arrangement would be costly and difficult for the department's Management Information Service (MIS) and City Information Services Department. The difficulties of operating a merged GA/Food Stamp would be compounded by the current SAWS configuration.

CBS problems with conversion to SAWS:

I discussed SAWS concerns in more depth with Edward Marchese and Paul Rosenberg of San Francisco's MIS. It appears that, the current SAWS may not meet the needs of a large urban welfare department. Marchese, the department's SAWS coordinator, said he'd attended SAWS user group meetings in Sacramento where formal agendas were basically non-existent, and the participants discussed whatever automation issue was on their mind. This comment suggested problems with the management of SAWS by CDSS. In articles published in government technology journals, SAWS is known as "...the largest welfare automation project ever attempted, the Legislature and other players have begun to raise concerns over its direction." The challenge of developing automation on this large scale, may be overwhelming the resources currently available.

How Case Data System differs from SAWS:

After San Francisco's target date for SAWS rollout was repeatedly postponed, Marchese didn't find it unusual when the user group meetings abruptly stopped. Marchese explained that CDS is a "transaction" system, and doesn't determine eligibility as SAWS does. However, the transactional and reporting abilities of CDS outweigh the advantages of uniform eligibility determination/benefit processing currently offered by SAWS. The time consuming nature of SAWS interviews go against the grain of fast-paced environments such as San Francisco's Non-Assistance Food Stamp (NAPS) office where each intake worker may interview up to eight new clients per day. These interviews typically run from 15 to 45 minutes. SAWS as it exists now, based on my observations in Napa and San Joaquin, would be too slow to serve these 2,000 plus monthly NAFS applicants with current staffing levels.

Concerns about SAWS functionality:

Mr. Marchese and Mr. Rosenberg offered the following functionality concerns raised by moving from an IBM mainframe, Case Data System environment to SAWS:

1. Computer Notices of Action, Speed letters and other required documents can be produced only in English and Spanish and lack worker control features available in CDS. With SAWS, many notices are returned to the EW for mailing, while CDS counties benefit from centralized mailing.

2. SAWS increases the complexity of the EW job. There are over 600 screens in SAWS, and error messages don't refer to screen(s) that need correction. Lack of system edits allow incorrect data inputs causing potential overpayments and errors. Moreover, SAWS relies on

worker response to system alerts, while CDS is programmed to take automatic action where possible.

3. Use of a two-digit aid code limits the ability to track discreet aid types and monitor caseload.trends, where CDS's three digit aid code allows close monitoring. Management reporting is limited, making MIS data for staffing decisions and responses to boards, commissions, etc. unavailable. The ability to create ad hoc reports does not currently exist in SAWS.

4. Lack of address matching features, interfaces with Food Stamp issuance systems, Employment programs, and other social services computers, and lack of a client index to non-SAWS services (IHSS, GA, Children's Services), limit service delivery. These shortcomings may lead to increased errors/fraud.

5. There are too many identification numbers: Central Index Numbers, application numbers, case numbers, caseload numbers, and worker numbers. Repetitive and duplicated entries often cause errors and increase time spent per case.

6. CDS runs GA and In Home Supportive Services case information and benefit issuance. SAWS does not.

These concerns highlight major areas of functionality not in the current SAWS package. In Napa, at the SAWS Maintenance Branch and when visiting San Joaquin's Stockton office, I kept these concerns in mind, and sought answers where possible. It became clear to me that the most likely beneficiaries of the current ISAWS are counties that previously operated with manual or partially automated systems. Nevertheless, all counties should benefit from the pioneering nature of Napa and the ISAWS counties as SAWS develops.

Now changes in SAWS are negotiated:

Efforts to improve SAWS functionality in several of the above areas are under discussion. I observed the procedure for modifying SAWS at a meeting with my Napa mentor, Teresa Zimny on March 15, 1995 in Sacramento. Priorities for Main Change Requests (MCR's) are decided in meetings attended by representatives from the 14 ISAWS counties, Deloitte and Touche (D&T), (contract) programmers and CDSS's Donna Valadez and Larry Smith. described this process as a real bottleneck. She said that there are insufficient testing and programming staff at the state to modify the SAWS system. AFDC/Food Stamp regulation changes are not being input into the master system. Because of this, counties would be held harmless for related Quality Control (QC) errors, even if they did not manually remedy the incorrect SAWS programming.

The Main Change Request impact report analyzes the scope of the SAWS change, the runs/programs impacted, user/training information, operational changes, county issues, activities to develop/implement the change (this section includes many subcategories) and the total estimated time and cost to accomplish the change. For instance, MCR#750 that will generate a Spanish pending verification checklist, is estimated to take 8 D&T hours, 73 CDSS hours, 66 programmer hours or a total of $9,034 for development. The estimate of hours required is based

on the experience of SAWS staff and the opinion of the most experienced programmers. Two of the top programmers currently working on ISAWS have stayed with the project since the development of NAPAS. This level of experience makes the estimates fairly reliable. The SAWS Maintenance Branch assigns its staff to work MCR's independently on separate tracks. This is a coordination issue for SAWS management as changes designed on one track may impact SAWS functionality in other runs or programs. If the MCR groups fail to communicate, there are endless possibilities for system problems. It is my opinion that SAWS staff should concentrate on the highest priority, instead of specific tracks, to make more efficient and effective use of resources.

Needs of ISHIIJS Counties:

The major goal of ISAWS is to get system operations sufficient for the day-today business of Napa, Kern, San Joaquin and all the ISAWS counties. But there is also needs to plan for future enhancements and improve the functionality of the system. The MCR priorities decided, reflect the needs of mostly manual counties as they rollout ISAWS and often do not address the bigger picture. Larry Smith illustrated the evolution of ISAWS with the following example. Because the Napa caseload did not have any refugees on public assistance, when state regulations were developed for NAPAS, refugee regulations and codes were not included. As San 3oaquin began to rollout on ISAWS, refugee regulations/codes needed to be developed for ISAWS. According to Larry Smith, this is just one example of how ISAWS is developing on an incremental basis.

Common process us. process unique to the county:

Napa County business practices continue to influence the direction of SAWS as the NAPAS system was designed to automate what Napa did as a manual county. Larry Smith cited the need for a flow chart analysis of systems prior to automation, then information technology can be used to get desired results without being dependent on following the manual process. In turn, as NAPAS gets transformed into ISAWS, counties are finding their eligibility and case management functions shaped by Napa's original business process. To some degree, CDS counties experience this effect as system design supports the common process of 19 counties. However, each CDS county can modify the system to meet their needs if funds and/or design expertise is available. SAWS does not have this provision. As most ISAWS counties come from a manual, or only partially automated orientation, developing the enhanced functionality CDS offers is not their primary concern. The need for some improvements such as ad hoc reporting are not going ignored, according to Larry Smith. The only Interim SAWS county that's currently converting from CDS to SAWS is Morin. Given Morin County's demographics, they do not face the same issues, large GA caseload and high application that San Francisco does. Morin's conversion experience, positive or negative, should be studied to facilitate San Francisco's transition to ISAWS or any future version of SAWS.

Multi-Platform SRl1JS:

Marchese commented on the Multi-Platform SAWS (MPSAWS) effort that Alameda and other counties proposed. MPSAWS plans to use software programs to translate SAWS (MAPPER languages to COBOL or other languages currently used in MPSAWS data processing centers. So

far, this effort has failed. The problems are similar to using a computer program to translate a book from English to Spanish. The meaning of words are distorted and the end product doesn't reflect the authors original intent. The Multi-Platform counties seek state and federal funds to continue funding this project. Because of technical difficulties and lack of results, funding is now held by the State Legislature. The Senate budget committee, chaired by Senator Thompson, strongly supports ISAWS, but wants more details and a better estimate of the costs of pursuing the MPSAWS approach before reappropriating additional funds.

Napa County Internship:

Teresa Zimny, Napa's Health and Human Services Eligibility Program Manager served as my mentor for the project. Napa's demographics facilitate the consolidation of Health and Human Services into one agency. Their size also favors the generic eligibility approach offered by the SAWS design. Generic intake provides efficiencies not offered by their previous manual system. In my opinion, a generic approach would be more difficult to implement in a larger county with offices divided by program as is San Francisco. Becoming more familiar with the SAWS process, I found myself questioning how the system could work in San Francisco. Mike McElroy, the Napa Help Desk manager put it succinctly, "you can make SAWS do anything you want it to do..." But as later meetings in Sacramento showed, change requests are backlogged and programming resources are scarce and expensive.

Auditor General Recommendations:

The report, Department of Social Services: <u>The Department's Approach to Welfare Automation Is Too Costly and Unlikely to Succeed</u> from Ernst & Young, cites California's welfare automation efforts, as "...outdated and the system is not performing as expected." The audit describes how in the late 80's, Los Angeles County applied for and received permission from the state and federal government to develop and run its own SAWS system as a federal demonstration project. Los Angeles plans to use UNISYS hardware as ISAWS does, but expects to avoid the software known as MAPPER used in ISAWS. MAPPER is proprietary software that can only be run on UNISYS hardware. This "closed architecture" prohibits competitive procurement and explains in part, the high cost of SAWS.

LERDER and MRGIC presented as usable options to ISRWS:

The audit depicts the Los Angeles Eligibility, Automated Determination, Evaluation and Reporting system (LEADER) and the MAGIC system as more cost effective solutions to welfare automation than ISAWS. Larry Smith, of CDSS disagrees. Mr. Smith points out that LEADER is really a concept in APD form, whereas ISAWS is a up-and-running system in three counties, soon to be rolled out in 12 more. He describes MAGIC as a county system or at best a county consortium system and prone to failure. This lack of reliability was borne out during the SAWS pause evaluation when MAGIC was down seven out of ten days. Larry Smith suggests reliability problems would be compounded if the MAGIC network was expanded statewide. Napa's Mike McElroy and Teresa Zimny both commented on how personnel originally assigned to MAGIC were reassigned to ISAWS after NAPAS was selected. Napa feels these staffers want the SAWS project to reflect a automation vision more like the MAGIC project. A Napa manager,

instrumental in the original NAPAS design went to the state on a two year contract, but returned early after experiencing conflict around the direction of ISAWS. McElroy sees the ISAWS system as calling for a professional class of eligibility worker, while the MAGIC system uses clerks to operate the expert system. This conflict may explain some of the criticism about mismanagement directed at SAWS.

Future Directions for SHLUS:

Ernst & Young recommend MAGIC and LEADER as more able to handle the volume of transactions of statewide welfare automation. Richard Vote, Fiscal Administrator for the San Jaoquin County Human Services Agency sees the future of welfare automation in California as a combination of systems, perhaps a consortium of counties operating variations of SAWS, another consortium with MAGIC. The wild card in the equation is how transferable the LEADER programming and technology will be if and when it's developed. From where I sit, future SAWS system rollout in CDS counties, in particular San Francisco, must build on the functionality already in CDS and incorporate some form of regulation application/eligibility determination. I'd also like to see EDS and the CDS counties get more actively involved in shaping the direction of California's welfare automation. Finally, the GA issue must not be ignored. Andrew Bushaw, a SFDSS staffer on contract to SAWS, believes that ISAWS can be expanded to run a file that maintains demographics and issues GA benefits. This type of flexibility is a must for the future. With welfare programs under legislative scrutiny and change, anything is possible.