

Report Addresses Changing Needs of Families

By BEVERLY BEYETTE, Times Staff Writer

It's all in the family—wrenching conflicts between responsibilities at home and workplace demands, disintegrating support systems and, for the first time, the specter of the next generation being downwardly mobile.

That was the message from the Legislature's year-old Joint Select Task Force on the Changing Family, whose first report, "Planning a Family Policy for California," was presented by co-chairs, State Sen. Diane E. Watson and Assemblyman Thomas H. Bates.

The California family is in trouble and the report is "an urgent call to action," Watson said at a breakfast Friday in Beverly Hills.

Bates asked for a public "outcry" demanding that outmoded policies be updated

and that unresponsive institutions act to meet identified challenges. These challenges include an increasing minority population, a growing gap between rich and poor, and a diversity of families that bear little resemblance to the nuclear family of the '50s.

The report recommends creation of a State Office of Family and Work to assist in developing family-friendly work policies, such as flextime and job-protected family leave after a birth or adoption. And it suggests that, in the awarding of state contracts, preference be given to bidders with pro-family employment policies.

Other recommendations:
—Expansion of subsidized child care for the low-income.
—Creation of adult day-care centers and

increased in-home professional support for care-givers to the elderly.

—Establishment of a network of state-funded programs to provide multicultural and multilingual parenting education and support services.

—Comprehensive state-funded services, including child care, continuing education, health care and vocational counseling, for teen-age mothers and fathers.

—A study to determine the best way to ensure physical and mental health coverage for all families; this should be followed by a statewide program, with families paying a manageable share.

—A "Vesper Marriage Act" as an option for those 60 and older, recognizing them as married "except for the purpose of taxation, inheritance and the receipt of pension

benefits."

—Child-support payments tied to the cost of living, with a provision that the state make payments if a parent defaults, then seek repayment.

—Expansion of subsidized preschool programs such as Head Start.

—A statewide elder volunteer action corps matching retirees' interests with community needs.

"All of this is going to cost a good deal of money," said task force member Leonard Schneiderman, dean of the UCLA School of Social Welfare. But, he emphasized, "nothing is more ludicrous" than the belief that cutting back on social programs saves money.

There are "three compelling reasons," he said. Please see **FAMILY, Page 6**

FAMILY: State Policy Outlined

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said, to spend the money for family-oriented programs: To maintain a competitive economy; to lessen the polarization between the haves and have-nots; and to prevent diminishment of the society as a whole.

"We are moving very rapidly toward two tiers in everything we do," including education, health care and jobs, Schneiderman said, cautioning that "there is a limit to deprivation" before the deprived begin to act out.

Watson acknowledged that "we don't have the resources" to implement the report's recommendations. Both she and Bates said they favored shifting state spending and increasing taxes, if necessary.

Work on Changing Attitudes

"It's not too late" to turn things around, Watson said. "We just have to work on changing attitudes before the problems become problems that we all have to face."

Statistics cited in the report point up how dramatically the California family has veered from the "Ozzie and Harriet" model of 30 years ago:

—Fewer than 1 in 10 families consist of the traditional model of breadwinner father, homemaker mother and two or more children. Today there are domestic partnerships without marriage, either heterosexual or homosexual; extended families; and single-parent families. One recommendation is to outlaw insurance practices that discriminate against unmarried couples.

—63% of mothers in two-parent families work outside the home.

—Almost one-fourth of California children live in poverty, a rate that has almost doubled since 1969. As the economy has shifted from manufacturing to services, real wages have declined as well as benefits such as health insurance and private pension plans.

—By the year 2000, Latinos will comprise 27% of the state's population, Asians will be 12%, blacks, 8%. The white population will decline to 54%.

—"How families fare deeply affects how the state fares," the report states. It emphasizes that "paid work and family care-giving are equally important" and ways must be found to integrate them—with policies that enhance, rather than replace, family resources.

Defining Family Functions

The task force did not attempt to define "the family." Rather, it defined its functions: To take care of the emotional and physical needs of its own; provide them with love and security; shape their values and social skills; and provide a haven from outside stresses.

The emphasis is not on AIDS or drug abuse or gang violence but on nitty-gritty, everyday dilemmas such as finding time to sit down as a family to dinner, help with the children's homework and get to know their friends. The report notes that time spent with the children in a grocery line or a traffic jam is not quality time.

Help is needed because "conventional support systems are unraveling," the report points out. Today's California family may live hundreds of miles from relatives, is apt not to know its neighbors and may move frequently.

Further, it states, "Hard work is no longer necessarily a route out of poverty for many families." The immigrant population tends to be segregated into low-end jobs, its children into inner-city schools where they are "undereducated."

"The pressures on today's families will not fade away," the report concludes, but the family will endure as an institution and needs help to solve the problems that threaten its health and stability. It asks, "If the public will not lobby for the family, who will?"

The task force includes educators, members of the religious community, labor, family law and business and representatives of social service agencies. The task force will hold its first public hearing on its recommendations June 23 in Oakland.

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Joint Select Task Force on the Changing Family

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LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE RECOGNIZES DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIPS AS PART OF THE CHANGING FAMILY AGENDA IN CALIFORNIA

Proposals Focus on Employee Benefits, School Curricula, Insurance Discrimination, and Rights of Survivors

A report just published by a state task force urges California lawmakers to recognize domestic partnerships as family relationships.

The report of the Joint Select Task Force on the Changing Family also includes several recommendations to eliminate discrimination against the nearly 1.4 million adults who live in unmarried-couple households in California. The domestic partnership proposals recommend that:

- * Public policies should respond to the changing needs of today's families, while respecting their privacy, integrity, and diversity; (See Report, page 11)
- * Domestic partnerships should be recognized as family relationships; (See Report, page 101)
- * Employee benefit plans should define family broadly enough to encompass the diversity of today's families, regardless of family structure; (See Report, page 27)
- * Public schools should expand curricula to promote recognition of family diversity by providing students with current information on changing family structures; (See Report, page 78)
- * Counseling services, whether publicly funded or provided through private health plans, should serve not just individuals, but all families regardless of their structure, including unmarried couples. (See Report, page 84)
- * Insurance practices, such as rate discrimination against unmarried couples, should be prohibited; (See Report, pages 100-102)
- * Wrongful death laws should be amended to allow adult dependents to recover damages when a domestic partner is killed by a criminal, drunk driver, or by other intentional or negligent conduct of a wrongdoer. (See Report, pages 100-102)