

GOVERNOR'S VETO  
AB 1074 (Patel)  
As Enrolled September 12, 2025  
2/3 vote

## SUMMARY

Makes updates to the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Reunification Program, which allows CalWORKs families who have children placed into foster care to receive monthly cash assistance for up to six months while active reunification efforts are ongoing, by clarifying that families can receive aid as if the child or children are still living with their parents

### *Senate Amendments:*

- 1) Clarify that a family is participating in a reunification case plan developed by a county child welfare agency, the county shall deem aid and services, as specified, as necessary for reunification.
- 2) Clarifies what family reunification services apply.
- 3) Delay implementation date to July 1, 2026, or when the Statewide Automated Welfare System can perform necessary automation, whichever is later.
- 4) Make technical changes.

### **Governor's Veto Message**

This bill would expand eligibility for the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Family Reunification (FR) program by authorizing the program's cash aid period for longer than six months, if needed; no longer requiring that all children be removed from the home to be eligible for CalWORKs FR; and no longer requiring that all parents be receiving cash aid to be eligible for CalWORKs FR cash aid and services.

While I support the author's intent to remove barriers in CalWORKs Family Reunification, this bill results in ongoing costs that were not accounted for in the 2025 Budget Act.

In partnership with the Legislature this year, my Administration has enacted a balanced budget that recognizes the challenging fiscal landscape our state faces while maintaining our commitment to working families and our most vulnerable communities. With significant fiscal pressures and the federal government's hostile economic policies, it is vital that we remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure.

## COMMENTS

*Background:* *California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids.* CalWORKs, the state's largest anti-poverty program, provides temporary cash assistance aimed at moving children out of poverty and helping qualified low income families meet their basic needs, such as rent, clothing, utility bills, food and other items needed to ensure children are cared for at home and safely remain with their families. In addition to cash assistance, adult CalWORKs recipients are

provided education, employment and training services designed to help remove barriers to work and promote self-sufficiency.

*Child Welfare Services (CWS).* California's CWS system plays a vital role in the state's safety net. Social workers across counties receive reports of abuse or neglect, investigate these concerns, and work to address them. Children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect fall under the jurisdiction of the county's juvenile dependency court. While the court maintains legal authority over the child, the CWS social worker is responsible for supporting the child's well-being.

The primary goal of the system is to ensure the safety and protection of children, while also striving to preserve and strengthen families through visitation and efforts at family reunification when possible. The CWS system allows for regular evaluations and reviews of the child's custody and placement, with decisions made in consultation with the child's social worker to ensure the best outcomes for the child. The state prioritizes the reunification of foster children with their biological families whenever feasible. When reunification isn't possible, the state aims to provide a permanent alternative placement, such as adoption or guardianship, with a secondary priority of placing the child with relatives or nonrelative extended family members.

*Using CalWORKs to Reunite Families in the CWS System.* Most counties report a significant number of children and families involved in both CalWORKs and the CWS system. Under such circumstances, parents or caretakers must navigate between the two systems, which often have conflicting requirements and timeframes.

AB 429 (Aroner), Chapter 111, Statutes of 2001, allowed for the continuation of CalWORKs services only for the parents of children who have been removed from the home and are receiving out-of-home care when a county welfare department or a court recommends family reunification services only.

Effective January 1, 2025, AB 135 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 85, Statutes of 2021, expanded upon on AB 429 and now allows for cash aid, child care, and reunification services to families participating in the CalWORKs Family Reunification program as part of their Reunification Plan for up to six full months, provided all other eligibility criteria are met.

The general premise of this program is to help families reunify rather than continue separation which is both harmful to the child and more costly to the state.

To be eligible, all participants who were members of the CalWORKs family when the CalWORKs-eligible child(ren) was removed from the home are eligible for the CalWORKs cash aid, child care, and/or reunification services for up to six full months when all of the following conditions apply:

- 1) All CalWORKs-eligible children were removed from the home and temporarily placed in out-of-home care by county welfare department or a court.
- 2) The family was receiving CalWORKs cash aid when all CalWORKs-eligible children were removed from the home.

- 3) The county welfare department or a court has determined that CalWORKs Reunification Program cash aid, child care, and/or services are necessary for reunification, and a reunification plan is in effect or being developed.

*This bill* would clarify that not all children in the home need to be taken away in order to be eligible and families did not need to be receiving aid prior to the removal of the child(ren).

*Equity Implications:* Reducing cash aid to CalWORKs families while their children are in foster care can further destabilize the family and hinder their ability to successfully reunify. Family reunification is considered to be one of the ultimate goals of the CWS system, when reunification is considered a safe and appropriate outcome. *This bill* seeks to clarify the provisions CalWORKs Reunification Program to allow for maximum usage.

### **According to the Author**

"This bill is critically needed to ensure California prioritizes keeping vulnerable families together by removing bureaucratic hurdles that unintentionally undermine family reunification efforts. Currently, overly rigid CalWORKs requirements can force low-income parents into impossible situations, jeopardizing their ability to maintain stability and reunify successfully with their children. By eliminating these counterproductive rules, [this bill] ensures families have the necessary resources—like cash aid and child care support—to address underlying issues that initially led to separation. Additionally, failing to make these reforms comes at a significant cost to the state, as placing children into the foster care system is far more expensive than providing families with continued CalWORKs cash aid. Ultimately, [this bill] offers an economically sound and compassionate approach, aligning state policy with the goal of strengthening families rather than further burdening those who need support the most."

### **Arguments in Support**

According to the Sponsors, Western Center on Law and Poverty, this bill allows the state to better achieve its goal of family reunification by promoting family stabilization.

### **Arguments in Opposition**

No opposition on file.

## **FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee on August 29, 2025:

- 1) Unknown ongoing General Fund costs for CalWORKs benefits and/or services and for the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for state administration.
- 2) Unknown one-time General Fund costs, potentially hundreds of thousands, for automation.
- 3) Unknown costs to counties for administration. Cost to counties would be potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

## **VOTES**

### **ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 5-1-0**

**YES:** Lee, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Celeste Rodriguez

**NO:** Castillo

**ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-3-1**

**YES:** Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

**NO:** Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Sanchez

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 61-13-5**

**YES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

**NO:** Alanis, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Macedo, Patterson, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Castillo, Chen, Hadwick, Hoover, Lackey

**SENATE FLOOR: 34-4-2**

**YES:** Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

**NO:** Alvarado-Gil, Choi, Jones, Seyarto

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Dahle, Niello

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-13-7**

**YES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

**NO:** Alanis, Castillo, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Johnson, Macedo, Sanchez, Ta

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Chen, Hadwick, Hoover, Lackey, Patterson, Tangipa, Wallis

**UPDATED**

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