
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 1746
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Version: May 18, 2026
Urgency: No
Consultant: Diana Dominguez

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Fiscal: Yes

Subject: CalWORKs: childcare request forms

SUMMARY

This bill would update requirements to notify an applicant for, or a recipient of, CalWORKs benefits of the availability of paid child care. This bill would require a county to approve or deny a request for child care within 10 calendar days of receiving a CalWORKs child care request form and eligibility information.

ABSTRACT

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which provides block grants to states to develop and implement their own state Welfare-to-Work programs designed to provide cash assistance and other supports and services to low-income families. (*42 United States Code [USC] 601 et seq.*)
- 2) Establishes the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program to provide cash assistance and other social services for low-income families through the federal TANF program. Under CalWORKs, each county provides assistance through a combination of state, county, and federal TANF funds. (*Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] 11200 et seq.*)
- 3) Establishes three stages of child care services through which a CalWORKs aid recipient will pass. States the intent of the Legislature that families experience no break in their child care services due to a transition between the three stages of child care services. (*WIC 10370(b)*)
- 4) Outlines the three stages of CalWORKs child care:
 - a. Provides that the county welfare department shall manage the first stage, during which a family shall receive a child care subsidy for any legal care chosen by the parent. Provides that the first stage begins upon entry of a person into the CalWORKs program.

- b. Provides that the second stage of child care begins when the county determines that the recipient's work or approved work activity is stable or when a recipient is transitioning off of aid and child care is available through a local stage two program. Provides that the local stage two agency shall assist in moving families to stage three as quickly as feasible. Provides that former CalWORKs recipients are eligible to receive child care services in stage one and stage two for up to a total of no more than 24 months after they leave cash aid, or until they are otherwise ineligible within that 24-month period.
 - c. Provides that the third stage of child care begins when a funded space is available, and that CalWORKs recipients are eligible for the third stage of child care. Provides that parents' eligibility for child care services will be governed by eligibility requirements for federal and state subsidized child development services, as specified. (*WIC 10371–10373*)
- 5) Requires an applicant for, or a recipient of, CalWORKs benefits to be informed of the availability of child care services upon enrollment in the CalWORKs program, and at later times when a participant expresses to the county a need for child care. Requires the county to verify if child care is needed to participate in a program activity, as defined, and, if needed, that child care services are authorized and that the participant has secured appropriate child care prior to requiring a participant to participate in any mandatory activity. (*WIC 11323.3(a)*)
- 6) Requires an applicant for, or a recipient of, CalWORKs benefits to be provided written notice, both at the time of application and when they sign an original or amended Welfare-to-Work plan, of the availability of paid child care. Requires the notice to inform applicants and recipients of all of the following:
 - a. Paid child care is available to allow them to be employed or participate in welfare-to-work activities or program activities, as defined.
 - b. The name and contact information for the local child care resource and referral program.
 - c. Assistance in finding and choosing a child care provider is available.
 - d. A recipient is required to inform the county welfare department of the recipient's need for paid child care as soon as that need arises.
 - e. The recipient is required to request a childcare subsidy from the county within 30 days from the first day child care services are received from each different provider, to be fully reimbursed for child care services. (*WIC 11323.3(b)*)
- 7) Requires the written notice, commencing January 1, 2021, or the date that the Statewide Automated Welfare System can perform the necessary automation to implement this provision, whichever date is later, to additionally be provided to the recipient at the time of orientation and various scheduled interactions with the recipient, as specified. (*WIC 11323.3(c)*)

- 8) Requires an applicant for, or recipient of, CalWORKs benefits to be asked to sign a copy of the written notice acknowledging that they have been informed of and received the notice. *(WIC 11323.3(e))*
- 9) States no payment shall be made for child care services pursuant to Section 8351 of the Education Code more than 30 days prior to the recipient's initial request for payment for the child care service from that provider, when the recipient received the written notice. *(WIC 11323.3(f))*
- 10) Requires CDSS to work with counties and other stakeholders to do both of the following:
 - a. Modify applicable CalWORKs notices and forms about child care to include the information described in 5).
 - b. Make the modified notices and forms available at times in addition to those specified in law, when and where possible and appropriate. *(WIC 11323.3(g))*
- 11) Requires the county to redetermine eligibility for the CalWORKs program annually and requires the family to complete a certificate of eligibility with specified information that may be required to establish the continuing eligibility and amount of grant. *(WIC 11265)*
- 12) Requires counties to redetermine recipient eligibility and grant amounts on a semiannual basis in a prospective manner, as specified. Requires the recipient to submit a semiannual report during the first semiannual reporting period following the application or annual redetermination of eligibility. *(WIC 11265.1)*

This Bill:

- 1) Amends the requirement to provide written notice to an applicant for, or a recipient of, CalWORKs benefits to additionally be provided notice at the time of approval and when they sign an annual certificate of eligibility or a semiannual report form.
- 2) Requires an applicant for, or a recipient of, CalWORKs benefits to be verbally informed of the availability of paid child care at the time of application, approval, and when they sign an original or amended Welfare-to-Work plan, annual certificate of eligibility, or a semiannual report form.
- 3) Adds to the list of required information to be included in the notice rules regarding retroactive payments.
- 4) Requires a written notice to be provided to an applicant or recipient only if the applicant or recipient is not already approved for child care.
- 5) Changes the implementation date for the written notice to be provided to the recipient at various scheduled intervals from January 1, 2021, or on the date that the Statewide Automated Welfare System can perform the necessary automation to implement this provision, whichever date is later to January 1, 2028, or on the date that the Statewide

Automated Welfare System can perform the necessary automation to implement this provision, whichever date is later.

- 6) Requires a county to approve or deny the request for child care within 10 calendar days of receipt of a CalWORKs child care request form and eligibility information.
- 7) Defines “written notice” for these purposes as inclusive of a CalWORKs child care request form.
- 8) Requires CDSS to implement this act through an all-county letter or similar instruction on or before June 1, 2027, until regulations are adopted.

FISCAL IMPACT

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

The California Department of Social Services estimates one-time General Fund costs of approximately \$893,000 for automation updates to the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) and BenefitsCal. These costs include printing, postage, updates for forms and in multiple languages, and updates to notify CalWORKs applicants and recipients of childcare availability during the additional touch points throughout their time on aid, among other things.

CDSS also anticipates ongoing GF costs to counties of \$234,000 for printing additional childcare availability notices and forms.

The Legislative Analyst’s Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Bill:

According to the author, “For many California families, the lack of accessible childcare is the single greatest barrier to maintaining stable employment and achieving self-sufficiency. AB 1746 simplifies the path for CalWORKs recipients by replacing outdated notices with a streamlined, mandatory childcare request form that requires a response within ten working days. By ensuring parents are informed of their options at every step, from application to annual renewal, we are removing the bureaucratic hurdles that far too often leave families in limbo. Our goal with this legislation is to provide our most vulnerable residents with the timely, reliable support they need to focus on their work and the future of their children.”

California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)

CalWORKs, the state's largest anti-poverty program, provides temporary cash assistance to help 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 and employment and training services designed to help remove barriers to work and promote self-sufficiency. These services are typically outlined in a Welfare-to-Work plan. CalWORKs program rules include time limits on eligibility, work requirements, and supportive services, including subsidized child care, to encourage program participation.

The CalWORKs program is funded through a combination of federal TANF funding and state and county funds. CDSS is the designated state agency responsible for program supervision at the state level, and counties are responsible for administering the program at the local level. According to CDSS, the projected CalWORKs caseload for the 2026–27 fiscal year is 344,310, a -1.0% change from the prior fiscal year.¹

CalWORKs Child Care

The Child Care and Development Services Act provides a comprehensive, coordinated, and cost-effective system of child care and development services for children from infancy to 13 years of age and their parents, including a full range of supervision, health, and support services through full- and part-time programs. The Act provides that it is the intent of the Legislature to ensure that recipients and former recipients of CalWORKs are connected as soon as possible to local child care. The CalWORKs child care program provides subsidized child care for CalWORKs recipients. Eligibility for CalWORKs child care is based on a family's total income, size, and need for care. CalWORKs recipients are eligible if they are employed or if they are participating in approved Welfare-to-Work activities. Families remain income eligible for CalWORKs Child Care until their family income surpasses 85% of the State Median Income, based on family size. As of July 1, 2025, 85% of the State Median Income is \$7,785 per month for a family of three². Families must also have a need for care, such as working or going to school.

Under CalWORKs child care, families are provided vouchers, which are used to obtain care in licensed Title 22 child care centers, licensed family child care homes, or license-exempt settings (Family, Friend, and Neighbor care). Families may choose the child care program and provider that best meets their needs. However, the availability of child care providers, in almost all settings and for all age groups, is limited. This can make it difficult for working parents to find child care providers that meet the families' needs and accept payment via subsidized vouchers. Upon choosing a provider, families must contact their county welfare department or local Alternative Payment Program agency to pay the child care provider directly for services on behalf of the family.

CalWORKs provides child care in three stages. Stage One is administered by the county welfare departments. Some county welfare departments contract with Alternative Payment Program agencies. Stage One is considered an entitlement program, meaning anyone who is eligible and

¹ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Fiscal-and-Financial-Information/Local-Assistance-Estimates/2026-27/Revisions/2026-may-revision-caseload-packet.pdf>

² https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/CCBs/2025/CCB_25-17.pdf?ver=u4mUIjWBWHLzf2SrIjQ8iA%3d%3d

has a qualifying need shall receive services. Families may be served in Stage One from when they start receiving CalWORKs aid until the county determines that the family situation is stable, or if no funds are available in Stage Two. Counties have discretion as to when to transfer CalWORKs families from Stage One to Stage Two. They may make the transfer when the county determines the recipient is “stable,” which could be when the recipient is achieving a long-term activity, such as employment or vocational training. Stable is not defined in code and is at the discretion of the county.

Stage Two is administered by CDSS through contracts with Alternative Payment Program agencies. Stage Two serves CalWORKs recipients whose situation has stabilized and families who are transitioning off CalWORKs assistance. Families leave Stage Two when they have been off cash aid for 24 months. Stage Two is considered an entitlement program. Former CalWORKs recipients are also eligible to receive child care services in Stage One or Stage Two for a total of no more than 24 months after they leave cash aid.

Stage Three is administered by CDSS. Stage Three provides services for former CalWORKs families after they have been off aid for 24 months. Families remain in Stage Three until the family’s income exceeds 85% of the State Median Income or until the children are no longer age eligible. Stage Three is dependent on the availability of funding and is not an entitlement program.

Immediate and Continuous Child Care

SB 80 (*Committee on Budget, Chapter 27, Statutes of 2019*), a budget trailer bill, required CalWORKs Stage One child care to be authorized for 12 months. Prior to SB 80, Stage One authorization was tied to a participant’s Welfare-to-Work plan, where breaks or changes in the plan would cause a break in Stage One child care. According to CDSS, “CalWORKs recipients who received short-term, activity-specific approvals reportedly encountered difficulties accessing and keeping child care services they need to work, prepare for work, or engage in the range of [Welfare-to-Work] activities.”³

Pursuant to SB 80, All County Letter (ACL) 19-99 directed county welfare departments to begin authorizing immediate and continuous Stage One child care starting October 1, 2019.⁴ The ACL defined “immediate child care” as the concurrent approval of CalWORKs cash aid and authorization for full-time CalWORKs Stage One child care services. The ACL also specified that the initial Stage One child care authorization shall be for 12 months, regardless of a county welfare department’s definition of “stable” or the date of transfer to Stage Two.

More recently, SB 1047 (*Limón, Chapter 923, Statutes of 2022*) extended continuous eligibility to 24 months for various child care programs, including CalWORKs Stage Two and Stage Three. AB 1808 (*Nguyen, Chapter 356, Statutes of 2024*) extended continuous eligibility to 24 months for CalWORKs Stage One.

Request for CalWORKs Child Care

³ <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2019/19-99.pdf>

⁴ *Ibid.*

The CDSS Manual of Policies and Procedures outlines the CalWORKs Child Care request process⁵. A CalWORKs recipient may request Stage One child care either verbally or in writing upon entry into the CalWORKs program, or at any subsequent time. A request for child care must include specific recipient and provider information. The county must process the child care request and determine the eligibility of the recipient and child care provider within 10 calendar days of receiving this information. If the county has not received the required information from the recipient or the child care provider within 30 calendar days, the county may deny the child care request.

This bill would require a CalWORKs applicant or recipient to be provided additional written notices of the availability of paid child care at the time of approval, annual certificate of eligibility, or a semiannual report form. This bill would also require a CalWORKs applicant or recipient to be verbally informed at each time they are provided a written notice. This bill would require a county to approve or deny a request for child care within 10 calendar days of receipt of a CalWORKs child care request form and eligibility information.

Related/Prior Legislation:

AB 1808 (Nguyen, Chapter 356, Statutes of 2024) extended the time a family is to be considered to meet all eligibility and need requirements for CalWORKs Child Care programs from 12 months to 24 months.

SB 1047 (Limón, Chapter 923, Statutes of 2022) extended the time a family is to be considered to meet all eligibility and need requirements for child care and development services, except CalWORKs Stage One, from 12 months to 24 months.

AB 131 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 116, Statutes of 2021), a budget trailer bill, transferred child care program and authority from the CDE to the CDSS, including CalWORKs Stage Two and Stage Three child care, among several other changes. AB 131 lifted and shifted several sections of law from EDC to WIC, including Chapter 21 of Part 1.8 of Division 9 of the WIC entitled Child Care for Recipients of the CalWORKs Program.

SB 89 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 24, Statutes of 2020) established the Early Childhood Development Act of 2020 to authorize the transfer of child care and development programs administered by the CDE to the CDSS, effective July 1, 2021, among several other changes.

AB 121 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 414, Statutes of 2019), a budget trailer bill, among other changes, revised SB 80 to clarify that, upon establishing initial or ongoing eligibility for CalWORKs Stage One child care, a family is considered to meet all eligibility and need requirements and be authorized for not less than 12 months, or until the recipient is transferred to Stage Two.

SB 80 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 27, Statutes of 2019), a budget trailer bill, among other changes, provided that CalWORKs Stage One child care shall be authorized for one year, or until the recipient is transferred to Stage Two.

SB 321 (Mitchell, 2019), among other things, would have provided that CalWORKs child care be full-time and Stage One child care be authorized for 12 months, or until the recipient is transferred to Stage Two. SB 321 would also have prohibited CalWORKs Stage One or Stage Two child care from being discontinued until the family has been enrolled or is ineligible for services in the subsequent stage of child care. SB 321 was referred to Assembly Human Services Committee but never set for hearing. Part of SB 321 was enacted through budget trailer bills.

AB 99 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 15, Statutes of 2017) provided that families who meet eligibility and need requirements for subsidized child care services shall receive services for not less than 12 months.

COMMENTS

Despite the requirement that a CalWORKs recipient receive immediate child care services, according to the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations (CCWRO), some families have waited four to six months before getting child care. According to a CCWRO analysis of CalWORKs data, only 36% of CalWORKs recipients statewide are receiving Stage One child care. In seven counties, the percentage of CalWORKs recipients in Stage One child care is less than 10%.

This bill seeks to increase the number of CalWORKs recipients receiving child care by connecting recipients to child care services sooner. This bill would require a county welfare department to provide written notices at additional intervals and to verbally inform CalWORKs applicants and recipients of the availability of paid child care. This bill would require a county to approve or deny a request for child care within 10 calendar days of receipt. Families receiving Stage One child care are, by definition, not in a stable situation. This bill is intended to provide additional opportunities for families receiving CalWORKs to apply for child care services for which they are already eligible.

The author may wish to consider updating an outdated reference to Education Code 8351 with the proper reference to Welfare and Institutions Code 10371. This reference was not updated when child care statutes were moved from Education Code to Welfare and Institutions Code via AB 131 in 2021.

PRIOR VOTES

Assembly Floor:	77 - 1
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	15 - 0
Assembly Human Services Committee:	7 - 0

POSITIONS

Support:
California Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations (Sponsor)

All for Kids

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

California Family Resource Association

Child Abuse Prevention Center

Oppose:

None received

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