

Date of Hearing: March 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

AB 1755 (Sharp-Collins) – As Introduced February 9, 2026

SUBJECT: CalWORKS

SUMMARY: Authorizes a parent to work any number of hours and still qualify for CalWORKs provided the family does not exceed the applicable gross or net income limits and is otherwise eligible for assistance. Specifically, **this bill**, removes the provision that requires, in order to meet eligibility for CalWORKs under the deprivation of parental support standard, a parent to work less than 100 hours in the preceding four weeks and to meet specified federal requirements.

EXISTING LAW:

State law:

- 1) Establishes the CalWORKs program to provide cash assistance and other social services for low-income families through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under CalWORKs, each county provides assistance through a combination of state, county and federal TANF funds. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 11200 *et seq.*)
- 2) Establishes income, asset, and real property limits used to determine eligibility for the CalWORKs program, and CalWORKs grant amounts, based on family size and county of residence. (WIC §§ 11150-11160, 11450 *et seq.*)
- 3) Considers, for purposes of CalWORKs, a child to be deprived of parental support or care due to unemployment of the child's parent or parents when the child's parent or parents have worked less than 100 hours in the preceding four weeks and meet specified requirements related to the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. (WIC § 11201(b))
- 4) Requires aid, services, or both, to be granted to families with related children under 18 years of age because they have been deprived of parental support or care due to:
 - a) The death, physical or mental incapacity, or incarceration of a parent;
 - b) The unemployment of a parent or parents; and,
 - c) Continued absence of a parent from the home due to divorce, separation, desertion, or any other reason, except absence occasioned solely by reason of the performance of active duty in the uniformed services of the United States. "Continued absence" exists when the nature of the absence is such as either to interrupt or to terminate the parent's functioning as a provider of maintenance, physical care, or guidance for the child, and the known or indefinite duration of the absence precludes counting on the parent's performance of the function of planning for the present support or care of the child. If these conditions exist, the parent may be absent for any reason, and may have left only recently or some time previously. (WIC § 11250)

- 5) Requires all individuals over 16 years of age, unless they are otherwise exempt, to participate in welfare-to-work activities as a condition of eligibility for CalWORKs. (WIC § 11320.3)

Federal law:

- 6) Establishes the federal 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 § 601 *et seq.*)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown, this bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

Background: *CalWORKs Overview.* CalWORKs is the state's primary cash assistance program. More specifically, CalWORKs implements the federal TANF program, which is a federal flexible block grant with the objective of providing income and support to families with children. CalWORKs provides eligible low-income families with cash grants and education, employment and training programs, and supportive services to give families opportunities to build resilience and achieve critical economic mobility.

In Fiscal Year 2024-25, 358,942 families received assistance, and the Administration projects a 1.3% increase to 363,766 families. As of October 2025, the maximum monthly grant for a family of three on CalWORKs (one parent and two children), if the family has no other income and lives in a high-cost-of-living county, is \$1,175, which is 53% of the 2025 Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The average grant amount in FY 25-26 was \$999.

CalWORKs Eligibility. CalWORKs is administered by each county, where each county determines eligibility through an application and an interview. Applicants must display eligibility of deprivation, age, property, residency, and income.

Deprivation: The aided child must be deprived of parental support or care because at least one parent is:

- Deceased;
- Either physically or mentally incapacitated;
- The applicant parent is not working or is working less than 100 hours per month; or,
- Continually absent from the home.

Age: Children may be eligible for CalWORKs until their 18th birthday, or are 18 years of age and in high school or vocational school full-time, and are expected to complete either program before their 19th birthday, or they are disabled and attend school full-time.

Property: The property of a child and the parent(s) must be under the following limits:

- Families without elderly or disabled members may have \$12,137 combined personal and real property per family.

- Families with elderly (those who are 60 years of age or older) or disabled members may have \$18,206 combined personal and real property per family.
- Furniture, clothing, and appliances are exempt.
- The family home is exempt provided the family lives in the home.
- Automobiles may be exempt for specific uses and/or up to \$33,499.

Residency: There are no durational residency requirements for the CalWORKs program. Families who make their residence in California and who intend to continue to live in California may be eligible. Family members must be legal residents of the United States.

Income Limits: A new CalWORKs Income Reporting Threshold (IRT) is released every year for the new Federal Fiscal Year, which runs from October 1 to September 30. If a family’s gross monthly income exceeds the IRT, the family must report their income, which requires the county to re-evaluate the family’s case. Because the IRT is determined annually, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) issues a new chart each fall to reflect changes. According to All County Letter No. 25-61 and effective October 1, 2025, to financially qualify, applicants must qualify using either Tier One or Tier Two in the IRT. The CalWORKs IRT amount for each family is the lower of the tiers below.

2026 CalWORKs Income Reporting Threshold	
Assistance Unit/Family Size	Tier Two IRT
0	\$1,696
1	\$1,696
2	\$2,292
3	\$2,888
4	\$3,483
5	\$4,079
6	\$4,675
7	\$5,271
8	\$5,867
Each additional member	Add \$596

- Tier One IRT: \$1,222 (55% of the 2025 FPL for a family of three) plus the amount of income last used to calculate the family’s FPL monthly benefits; or
- Tier Two IRT: The amount of income which may render the family ineligible for CalFresh, or 130% of the 2025 FPL, as shown in the chart.

CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Requirement. Unless deemed exempt, an adult in a one-parent assistance unit is required to participate in welfare-to-work activities for an average of 30 hours per week or, in the case of someone who is pregnant or parenting a child under six years of age, an average of 20 hours per week, monthly. In a two-parent assistance unit, one or both adults must participate in welfare-to-work activities for a combined average of 35 hours per week. Welfare-to-work activities include participation in subsidized and unsubsidized employment, community service, adult basic education, community college, job skills, training, mental health counseling, substance use disorder treatment, domestic abuse services, or other activities necessary to assist recipients in obtaining employment.

If a CalWORKs recipient who is not exempt from participation does not meet the welfare-to-work requirements, the recipient may be sanctioned, and that recipient’s portion of the family’s grant may be subtracted from the amount provided to the family.

Supportive services are available for families participating in welfare-to-work activities. They include childcare, transportation, ancillary expenses, mental health services, non-medical substance abuse services, and personal counseling. A recipient may be excused from participating in welfare-to-work activities for good cause and will not be sanctioned if required supported services are not available.

This bill would allow a participant to work any number of hours and still qualify for assistance as long as they pass the means test and do not exceed income requirements. To put this into context, California's minimum wage is \$16.90, and if someone works 160 hours/month, they are grossing \$2,704/month. If they were a family of three, they would be income-eligible, but ineligible due to the deprivation eligibility requirements which cap the number of hours a parent can work while still receiving aid.

Author's Statement: According to the Author, "California's safety net should support families who are working to make ends meet, not penalize them for doing so. The 100 hour rule is an outdated provision that denies assistance to families who remain in poverty simply because a parent works additional hours. [This bill] modernizes CalWORKs by eliminating this obsolete barrier and ensuring that eligibility is based on income and need. This bill advances equity, supports family stability, and strengthens California's commitment to reducing child poverty."

Equity Implications: This program is the state's primary cash aid safety net program and helps over 350,000 families and 650,000 children each year. According to the California Budget and Policy Center, "children experiencing poverty are more likely to face poverty in adulthood, impacting their overall well-being. When family incomes fall short of meeting basic needs, children may struggle to concentrate in school, face increased health risks in crowded living conditions, and endure heightened stress levels, negatively affecting their immune system and neurological development."

This bill may help this population by allowing low-income, working families and underemployed families to still receive assistance and not penalize recipients and applicants for working full time.

Arguments in Support: The Reimagine CalWORKs Coalition writes, "The 100-hour rule policy assumes that working an average of 25 hours a week can generate enough income for a parent to provide for their family and further assumes the family's income is above the eligibility threshold (known as the Minimum Basic Standard of Adequate Care or MBSAC). This old welfare rule known as the "work penalty" was adopted after the welfare reform era of the 1990's. It was based on assumptions about sufficiency of income from hours worked, which can be incorrect, and which have served no good purpose but to punish hard working families and harm children who are poor. California is one of only four states that still implements this regressive 100-hour AFDC policy from the early 20th century. The other states are Kentucky, Mississippi, and South Dakota."

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 1324 (Sharp-Collins) of 2025 would have required the CDSS to conduct a feasibility study on expanding the CalWORKs program; update various eligibility requirements for CalWORKs;

and, prioritize specified employers to participate in CalWORKs' employment services placements. *AB 1324 was vetoed by Governor Newsom for fiscal reasons.*

SB 65 (Skinner), Chapter 449, Statutes of 2021, established the California Omnibus Act, which, among other things, eliminates the mandatory requirement to work or participate in welfare-to-work for pregnant persons, and makes participation voluntary for all pregnant people, regardless of whether the individual meets prior exemption requirements.

AB 1004 (Calderon), Chapter 99, Statutes of 2021, deleted requirements that, in order to be exempt from being considered income under the CalWORKs program, income or stipends related to the decennial census must be earned on the year of, or year prior to, a census, so that all such income or stipends may be exempted, regardless of when it is earned, and made those changes effective immediately.

AB 79 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 11, Statutes of 2020, among other things, authorized a 60-month CalWORKs lifetime time limit and eliminated the 24-month time clock for certain WTW activities, effective May 1, 2022, or when CDSS notifies the Legislature that all necessary automation changes are complete.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (Co-Sponsor)
 Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations (Co-Sponsor)
 Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations (Co-Sponsor)
 County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) (Co-Sponsor)
 End Child Poverty California Powered by Grace (Co-Sponsor)
 Parent Voices (Co-Sponsor)
 SEIU California (Co-Sponsor)
 Western Center on Law and Poverty (Co-Sponsor)
 American Academy of Pediatrics, California
 California Association of Food Banks
 California Family Resource Association
 CFT – a Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO
 Child Abuse Prevention Center and its Affiliates Safe Kids California, Prevent Child Abuse California and the California Family Resource Association
 Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto

Opposition

None on file.

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