

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
Alex Lee, Chair
AB 2510 (Arambula) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: CalWORKs

SUMMARY: Updates and clarifies eligibility for the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) family reunification program. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Permits families to receive aid longer than six months.
- 2) Clarifies that not all children need to be removed from the home and placed in the child welfare system to be eligible for the CalWORKs family reunification program.
- 3) Clarifies that not all children need to be reunified to remain eligible for the CalWORKs family reunification program.
- 4) Requires that the sanction for failing to verify the immunization of a child ends upon the removal of the child from the assistance unit and their out-of-home placement.
- 5) Requires, for the purposes of eligibility for families, if a child or children have been removed from a CalWORKs assistance unit and placed with an adult who, prior to the removal, was a noncustodial parent, either of the following conditions are met:
 - a) The family remains eligible for CalWORKs family reunification cash aid, if otherwise eligible; or,
 - b) The parent is otherwise eligible for aid.
- 6) Exempts individuals receiving aid who are cooperating in the development of, or participating in, a CalWORKs family reunification plan from having to participate in welfare-to-work activities.
- 7) Rather than multiple plans, requires welfare-to-work activities and services to be included in a CalWORKs reunification plan and satisfy the requirement to have a welfare-to-work plan, or in a jointly developed child welfare services (CWS) and CalWORKs welfare-to-work plan, which will serve as the CalWORKs reunification plan.
- 8) Defines CalWORKs reunification plan as the plan for individuals receiving CalWORKs benefits that sets forth all of the activities and services that will be provided through the welfare-to-work program and all of the reunification services that will be provided to the individual through the CWS case plan to assist the individual in reunifying with children who have been removed from the home and placed in out-of-home care.
- 9) Exempts child support payments received by an applicant for, or recipient of, aid from being constituted as income for the purposes of determining eligibility for CalWORKs family reunification program.

- 10) Specifies that a CalWORKs applicant or recipient who is not eligible for federal assistance and who is, or will be, receiving cash aid, as specified, that is fully state-funded is exempt from specified requirements must continue to receive child support as though they were not a recipient of CalWORKs.
- 11) Prohibits a county from using the federally funded, statewide automated child support collection system to collect child support on behalf of an applicant or recipient

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Allows reunification parents who were receiving aid when the child was removed to also be eligible to receive cash aid and childcare services if the county has determined that they are necessary for reunification. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 11203(b))
- 2) Defines “family preservative services” as services for children and families designed to help families, including adoptive and extended families, at risk or in crisis, including all of the following:
 - a) Services programs designed to help children return to families from which they have been removed, where safe and appropriate, or be placed for adoption or with a legal guardian, or, if adoption or legal guardianship is determined not to be safe and appropriate for the child, in some other planned, permanent living arrangement;
 - b) Preplacement preventive services programs, including, but not limited to, intensive family preservation programs designed to help children at risk of foster care placement remain safely with their families;
 - c) Service programs designed to provide follow up care to families to whom a child has been returned after a foster care placement;
 - d) Respite care of children to provide temporary relief for parents and other caregivers, including, but not limited to, foster parents;
 - e) Services designed to improve parenting skills by reinforcing parents’ confidence in their strengths and helping them to identify where improvement is needed and to obtain assistance in improving those skills with respect to matters such as child development, family budgeting, coping with stress, health, and nutrition; and,
 - f) Infant safe haven programs that provide a way for a parent to safely relinquish a newborn infant at a safe haven designated pursuant to state law. (WIC § 16601(b))
- 3) Requires the court, at the dispositional hearing, to order a social worker to provide CWS services to a child who has been removed from their parents' custody, and to the parents in order to support the goal of reunification, for a specified time period, except under certain circumstances. Provides that children and families in the CWS system should typically receive a full six months of reunification services if the child is under three years of age, and 12 months if the child is over three years of age, but that may be extended up to 18 or 24 months, as provided. (WIC § 361.5(a))
- 4) Provides that reunification services under 3) above, need not be provided if the court finds, by clear and convincing evidence, that specified conditions exist, including:

- a) The parent is suffering from a mental disability that renders the parent incapable of using the reunification services;
- b) The parent has caused the death of another child through abuse or neglect;
- c) The child or a sibling has been adjudicated a dependent as the result of physical or sexual abuse;
- d) The parent has been convicted of a violent felony; or,
- e) The parent has a history of drug or alcohol abuse and has failed to comply with treatment programs as provided. (WIC § 361.5(b))

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

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. 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 is not 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 California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids 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 (Aronor), 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 AB 429 and now allows for cash aid, childcare, 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, childcare, 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 the county welfare department or a court;
- 2) The family was receiving CalWORKs cash aid when all CalWORKs-eligible children were removed from the home; and,
- 3) The county welfare department or a court has determined that CalWORKs reunification program cash aid, childcare, and/or services are necessary for reunification, and a reunification plan is in effect or being developed.¹

This bill would clarify that not all children in the home need to be taken away in order to be eligible, and that if only some of the children were reunified, the family remains eligible.

Author’s Statement: According to the Author, “Family reunification is often in the best interest of children and their families. When children are placed in foster care, parents must meet a variety of requirements in order to reunify, including maintaining stable housing, employment, and access to supportive services. CalWORKs Family Reunification assistance was created to help stabilize families during this critical period by providing temporary cash aid and services when they are necessary to support reunification.

“Unfortunately, guidance issued by the California Department of Social Services has restricted eligibility for this assistance in ways that are inconsistent with legislative intent. Current administrative interpretation requires that all CalWORKs-eligible children be removed from the home for a family to qualify and ends assistance if any eligible child joins the household. These restrictions can undermine family stability and make it more difficult for parents to meet reunification requirements.

“[This bill] clarifies the law to ensure families can receive CalWORKs Family Reunification assistance when children are temporarily absent due to foster care placement, even if other children remain in or return to the home. By removing unnecessary barriers to assistance, the bill will help promote family stability, supports successful reunification, and ensures the program operates as the Legislature originally intended.”

¹ <https://cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2025/25-05.pdf?ver=t95-5SCcYoYyUior45ueSQ%3d%3d>

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 of the CalWORKs family reunification program to allow for maximum usage.

Arguments in support: According to the Reimagine CalWORKs coalition, “[This bill] helps to fulfill the State’s goal of reunifying CalWORKs families with their children by removing unnecessary barriers. These changes are necessary to fulfil the intent of the original law and will help to support these vulnerable families and help make them whole.”

Arguments in opposition: None on the file.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 1074 (Patel) of 2025, was substantially similar to this bill. *AB 1074* was vetoed by Governor Newsom because of ongoing costs that were not accounted for in the 2025 Budget Act.

AB 135 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 85, Statutes of 2021, see comments above.

AB 429 (Aronor), Chapter 111, Statutes of 2001, see comments above.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Western Center on Law and Poverty (Sponsor)
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organization
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations
County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)
End Child Poverty California Powered by GRACE
End Poverty in California (EPIC)
Parent Voices
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Opposition

None on file.

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