

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Buffy Wicks, Chair
AB 2510 (Arambula) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

Policy Committee: Human Services

Vote: 5 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: Yes

SUMMARY:

This bill prohibits child support payments from counting as income when determining eligibility for the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, and updates and clarifies eligibility for the CalWORKs family reunification program.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Exempts child support payments received by an applicant for or recipient of CalWORKs aid from being counted as income for the purposes of determining eligibility for CalWORKs.
- 2) For purposes of the CalWORKs family reunification program, beginning July 1, 2027, or when the State Automated Welfare System (SAWS) can perform the necessary automation, whichever is later:
 - a) Clarifies that CalWORKs families who have children placed into foster care may receive cash aid as if the child or children are living with their parents.
 - b) Clarifies that not all children need to be removed from the parents or that some, but not all, of the children removed from the parent or parents have been reunified for a family to remain eligible for aid.
 - c) Clarifies that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) may extend the six-month time period under which parents are eligible to receive aid.
 - d) 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, then either the family remains eligible for CalWORKs family reunification cash aid, if otherwise eligible or the parent is otherwise eligible for aid.
 - e) Exempts from CalWORKs child immunization requirements a family participating in a reunification case plan and receiving aid under the above provisions.
 - f) Rather than have multiple plans, requires a county to include CalWORKs welfare-to-work activities and services in a CalWORKs reunification plan, which satisfies the requirement to have a welfare-to-work plan, or in a jointly developed child welfare services and CalWORKs welfare-to-work plan, which will serve as the CalWORKs reunification plan, as defined for these purposes.

- 3) Exempts an individual receiving aid who is cooperating in the development of, or participating in, a CalWORKs family reunification plan from the requirement to participate in welfare-to-work activities.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) If the full child support passthrough is disregarded as income for CalWORKs purposes, CDSS estimates an ongoing total General Fund (GF) cost of \$146 million. This cost includes repayment of the federal share of the passthrough that exceeds the federally established thresholds of \$100 or \$200, as required by federal rules, and costs for families that maintain higher benefits or remain on aid longer. This cost will be offset to the extent that approximately 7,000 CalWORKs families receive a lower benefit because the adults time out sooner without the child support passthrough. CDSS estimates the net GF cost to be \$125.5 million annually.
- 2) CDSS estimates a one-time GF automation cost of \$293,000 to disregard the support payments.
- 3) Unknown costs to counties for administration. Costs to counties would be potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

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.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** 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 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 necessary to support reunification.

Unfortunately, guidance issued by [CDSS] has restricted eligibility for this assistance in ways that are inconsistent with legislative intent. 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.

- 2) **Background. *Child Welfare Services (CWS) and CalWORKs.*** A child who has been removed from their home 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 state prioritizes the reunification of foster children with their biological families whenever feasible.

CalWORKs, the state's largest anti-poverty program, provides temporary cash assistance and supportive services 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.

Most counties report a significant number of children and families involved in both the CalWORKs and the CWS systems.

Child Support Passthrough. Existing law requires a recipient of CalWORKs aid, as a condition of aid, to assign their right to child support to the state – meaning support that would otherwise flow to the family flows to the state to offset cash assistance paid. Existing law requires either \$100 or \$200 in monthly child support collected to be “passed through” to a recipient of CalWORKs aid, and prohibits this amount from being considered income of the recipient family or from being deducted from the amount of aid to which the family would otherwise be eligible.

This bill prohibits child support payments received by an applicant for or recipient of CalWORKs from constituting income for purposes of determining eligibility for CalWORKs, thus allowing the entire child support payment to be retained by (passed through to) the CalWORKs family.

Family Reunification. The CalWORKs family reunification program allows parents who are receiving CalWORKs benefits to continue to receive aid and services when their child has been removed from the home and placed in foster care or the home of a relative. Services are available for up to six months while active reunification efforts are ongoing, if certain conditions are met.

Existing law requires CDSS to provide implementing guidance for the reunification program. Advocates assert that CDSS's guidance overly restricts when a family may continue to receive assistance, which is inconsistent with the intent of the statute. This bill makes clarifying changes that allow reunification assistance to continue under broader circumstances.

- 3) **Related Legislation.** AB 1074 (Patel), of this legislative session, is similar to this bill, but does not include the child support provisions. AB 1074 was vetoed by Governor Newsom who cited concerns over “ongoing costs that were not accounted for in the 2025 Budget Act.”

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