

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 2510 (Arambula)
As Amended May 18, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Updates and clarifies eligibility for the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) family reunification program.

Major Provisions

For purposes of the CalWORKs family reunification program:

- 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, for the purposes of eligibility, 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 is met:
 - a) The family remains eligible for CalWORKs family reunification cash aid, if otherwise eligible; or,
 - b) The parent is otherwise eligible for aid.
- 5) 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.
- 6) 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.
- 7) 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.
- 8) Exempts from CalWORKs child immunization requirements a family participating in a reunification case plan and receiving aid under the above provisions.
- 9) For a family whose grant was lowered as a sanction for not cooperating with child support enforcement, requires the sanction to end upon the removal of the child from the assistance unit and their placement into out-of-home care.

10) Specifies that this bill shall be implemented on beginning July 1, 2027, or when the State Automated Welfare System can perform the necessary automation, whichever is later.

11) Permits the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to implement this bill via all-county letter.

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.

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.

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>

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 fulfill the intent of the original law and will help to support these vulnerable families and help make them whole."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee on May 14, 2026:

Ongoing General Fund (GF) costs in the low millions of dollars annually to provide family reunification under additional circumstances and to accommodate the immunization exemption and child support passthrough.

California's annual \$3.7 billion federal TANF block grant may be used flexibly within the CalWORKs program. It is fully allocated within the existing and proposed state budgets. Therefore, this analysis assumes any new costs for CalWORKs will be funded by the GF. State GF costs may be mitigated to the extent TANF funding is not fully expended in any particular year, or if one of the CalWORKs subaccounts has sufficient revenue available to support grant costs.

CDSS estimates a one-time GF automation cost of \$293,000 to disregard the support payments.

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.

VOTES**ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 5-0-2**

YES: Lee, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Castillo, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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