

THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 2510
Author: Arambula (D)
Amended: 8/20/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 4-0, 6/29/26
AYES: Becker, Laird, Pérez, Weber Pierson
NO VOTE RECORDED: Ochoa Bogh

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-2, 8/13/26
AYES: Cervantes, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NOES: Seyarto, Dahle

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 59-7, 5/27/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: CalWORKs

SOURCE: Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations
Western Center on Law & Poverty

DIGEST: This bill 1) makes a number of changes for individuals who are recipients of both California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) benefits and child welfare family reunification services; and 2) clarifies that a family of CalWORKs beneficiaries can still receive benefits if a child is removed from the home even if other children remain in the home, if they are otherwise still eligible.

Senate Floor Amendments of 8/20/26 1) make technical corrections; 2) recasts the section regarding placement with a noncustodial parent; 3) clarifies the operative and inoperative dates of July 1, 2027 or when the California Department of Social Services notifies the Legislature that it can perform the necessary automation, 4) removes the family reunification plan requirement and instead allows anyone receiving aid or services for CalWORKs family reunification to be exempt from welfare-to-work requirements; 5) allows the bill to be implemented through all-county letters.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which permits states to implement the program under a state plan. (Title 42 United States Code (USC) 601 et seq.)
- 2) Establishes the 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) Section 11200 et seq.)
- 3) Requires families to be grouped into “assistance units” for the purposes of determining eligibility and computing the amount of aid payment in CalWORKs. (WIC Section 11450.16)
- 4) Establishes income, asset, and real property limits used to determine eligibility for the CalWORKs program and grant amounts based on family size and county of residence. (WIC Section 11150-11160, 11450 et seq.)
- 5) Requires all individuals 16 years of age or older, unless they are otherwise exempt, to participate in welfare-to-work activities as a condition of eligibility for CalWORKs. (WIC Section 11320.3, 11322.6)
- 6) Requires individuals who participate in welfare-to-work activities to enter into a written welfare-to-work plan with the county welfare department after assessment. (WIC Section 11325.21)
- 7) Establishes asset limits to determine eligibility for CalWORKs aid. Prohibits a CalWORKs applicant or recipient from receiving aid if they have countable resources over \$10,000, or over \$15,000 if one member of the household is age 60 or older or has a disability or has a vehicle valued over \$25,000. Requires asset limits to be increased every year based on the California Necessities Index. (WIC Section 11155)
- 8) Prohibits an aid payment for any adult in the assistance unit if the required documentation of child immunization is not provided within the specified time period. (WIC Section 11265.8)

- 9) Allows a family receiving CalWORKs, when a child has been removed from the home to continue to receive aid for six months if they are otherwise eligible if the following conditions are met:
 - a) The child has been removed from the parent or parents and placed in out-of-home care.
 - b) When the child was removed from the parent or parents, the family was receiving aid.
 - c) The county has determined that the provision of aid or other CalWORKs supportive services are necessary for reunification. (WIC Section 11203(b))
- 10) Defines “family reunification services” as the services and activities described in the United States Code that are provided to a child that is removed from the child’s home and placed in a foster family home or a child care institution or a child who has been returned home and to the parents or primary caregiver of the child, in order to facilitate the reunification of the child safely and appropriately within a timely fashion, and to ensure the strength and stability of the reunification. (WIC Section 16601)

This bill:

- 1) Allows a family assistance unit receiving CalWORKs to continue receiving aid and services as if the child were still there, for six months or longer if the county approves it, if the following conditions are met:
 - a) The child has been removed from the parent or parents and placed in out-of-home care. Not all children must be removed from the home for this section to apply.
 - b) The family was receiving aid when the child was removed.
 - c) The county determines that the provision of aid and services are necessary for reunification.
 - i. Requires, if a family is cooperating in the development of, or participating in, a reunification case plan developed by a child welfare agency, the county shall deem aid and services necessary for reunification.
 - d) If the child was removed and placed with their noncustodial parent and both the family and that noncustodial parent is otherwise eligible for aid.

- 2) Makes a child or children removed from a family participating in a reunification case plan developed by a county child welfare agency exempt from the immunization requirements.
- 3) Requires a family receiving state-funded CalWORKs reunification cash aid whose grant was lowered as a sanction for not cooperating with child support enforcement to have the sanction end upon the removal of the child from the assistance unit and their placement into out-of-home care.
- 4) Allows a family to continue receiving CalWORKs aid if a child is placed into foster care with their noncustodial parents if they are eligible for CalWORKs reunification aid, as specified. The parent with whom the child is placed can also receive CalWORKs aid if they are otherwise eligible.
- 5) Exempts an individual receiving aid or services for CalWORKs family reunification from mandatory welfare-to-work participation or a welfare-to-work plan.
- 6) Prohibits appropriation being made to implement this bill.
- 7) Makes the provisions of this bill operative on July 1, 2027 or whenever the department notifies the Legislature that the Statewide Automated Welfare System can perform the automation necessary to implement this section, whatever date is later.
- 8) Allows these provisions to be implemented by all-county letter or similar written instruction.

Background

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 program 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

disqualify families from assistance who are still working to reunify with the remaining children, undermine family stability, and make it more difficult for parents to meet reunification requirements.

“AB 2510 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.”

CalWORKs. As California’s version of the federal TANF program, CalWORKs is the state’s largest anti-poverty program. CalWORKs 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. These services are typically outlined in a welfare-to-work plan. 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.

Welfare-to-Work. Adults who participate in CalWORKs are also required to participate in welfare-to-work activities, unless exempted, which includes: employment, education, job skills training, and/or vocational education, work study on college campuses, on-the-job training, community service, and job retention services, or activities to address or remove barriers like mental health, substance use disorder, and domestic abuse. Eligible families can also receive supportive services like child care, transportation financial assistance, financial assistance for ancillary expenses, mental health services, substance abuse services, and personal counseling. Everyone who is required to participate in welfare-to-work activities must obtain a welfare-to-work plan. The plan outlines what a participant must do, including working, going to school, or other activities, the hours they need to participate, and the services they can use. This bill allows parents that have children involved in the child welfare system and receiving CalWORKs reunification services to be exempt from welfare-to-work requirements.

Reunification Services. When a child enters the child welfare system, parents are generally provided services in order to safely reunify with their children due to the goal of the dependency system being, whenever possible, to reunite children with their families. These services are time limited, and the length of time for which services are provided depends on the child's age at the time of removal.

Reunification services are typically offered for six to 12 months, with the ability to extend services to 18 or 24 months. These services, generally geared towards addressing the circumstances that caused the child to be removed from the parents in the first place, can include drug or alcohol treatment, anger management, counseling and other behavioral health services, parenting classes, or other services that would allow the child to be safely returned to the home.

Additionally, reunification services often include services and case planning to assist with reunification, such as mental health treatment for the child and parents, and visitation between the parent and child. As parents make progress on their treatment and move towards the goal of reunification, visitation may become more frequent and extend to overnight or weekend visits. This bill clarifies that parents receiving reunification services that are also CalWORKs beneficiaries can continue to receive benefits after a child has been removed even if not all children have been removed.

CalWORKs Immunization Policy. Though CalWORKs is administered by the state, benefits are funded by the federal government and the program abides by federal laws and regulations. Within the bounds of those federal laws, California has the ability to add additional regulations. Currently California has CalWORKs requirements about childhood vaccinations that are state specific requiring recipients of CalWORKs to submit proof that any children in the household under the age of six have received age-appropriate vaccinations. For CalWORKs applicants, documentation must be submitted within 30 days of approval of Medi-Cal or within 45 days of date of application for CalWORKs if a person is already enrolled in Medi-Cal. For CalWORKs recipients, documentation must be submitted 45 days after the county notifies the recipient that proof of immunization is required. If documentation is not submitted, the household will be sanctioned and cash aid will be lowered until proof is submitted. There are exemptions; if a parent submits documentation from a healthcare professional that the child should not be vaccinated for medical reasons or submits an affidavit stating that immunizations are against their beliefs, they will not be sanctioned. This bill adds exemptions for children that are removed from the home by child welfare services if the family is participating in CalWORKs family reunification.

Related/Prior Legislation

AB 1074 (Patel, 2025) was substantially similar to this bill. AB 1074 was vetoed.

SB 290 (Smallwood-Cuevas, 2025) would, commencing July 1, 2026, or the date when CDSS has made a specified determination, whichever is later, repeal certain CalWORKs provisions and instead require that notice to advise CalWORKs applicants and recipients of the obligation for children admitted to a public or private elementary or secondary school, childcare center, day nursery, nursery school, family daycare home, or development center, to secure the immunizations required for that admission. This bill is pending in the Assembly Human Services Committee.

SB 1341 (Hurtado, 2020) would have provided that eligible parents are eligible for the payment of aid, subject to an appropriation by the Legislature for this purpose. SB 1341 was vetoed.

AB 135 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 85, Statutes of 2021) clarified the CalWORKs services and aid available to families who families have had a child removed by child welfare services.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee: “CDSS estimates an initial General Fund cost of \$2 million and annual ongoing General Fund costs of \$1.6 million for CalWORKs grants that will be maintained for families even after placing the child with child welfare services and for removing penalties related to immunization requirements. These costs also include a one-time automation cost of \$805,000 for the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS). 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.”

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/20/26)

Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations (Co-Source)
Western Center on Law & Poverty (Co-Source)
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
County Welfare Directors Association of California
End Child Poverty CA Powered by Grace

Parent Voices
Service Employees International Union

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/20/26)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 59-7, 5/27/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Gallagher, Hadwick, Macedo, Sanchez

NO VOTE RECORDED: Alanis, Castillo, Chen, Davies, Flora, Jeff Gonzalez, Hoover, Johnson, Lackey, Patterson, Celeste Rodriguez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

Prepared by: Naima Ford Antal / HUMAN S. / (916) 651-1524
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