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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

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### **AB 969 (Celeste Rodriguez) - CalWORKs: family violence option and gender-based violence information**

**Version:** June 26, 2025

**Urgency:** No

**Hearing Date:** August 18, 2025

**Policy Vote:** HUMAN S. 5 - 0

**Mandate:** Yes

**Consultant:** Agnes Lee

**Bill Summary:** AB 969 would make several changes to provisions of the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program related to family violence.

#### **Fiscal Impact:**

- The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) estimates the following:
  - General Fund costs of \$2.5 million in the first year and \$853,000 ongoing thereafter for an increase in months of benefits provided.
  - One-time General Fund costs of \$2.1 million and ongoing General Fund costs of \$435,000 for automation.
  - No fiscal impact to state administration.
- Unknown costs to counties for administration. Cost to counties would be potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

**Background:** The CalWORKs 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 participate in welfare-to-work activities and are provided education and employment and training services designed to help remove barriers to work and promote self-sufficiency. CalWORKs is funded through a combination of state and county funds and federal funds received through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Current law requires a county to waive a CalWORKs program requirement for a recipient who has been identified as a past or present victim of abuse when it has been determined that good cause exists, as specified. Current law requires all CalWORKs applicants and recipients to be informed verbally and in writing, and to the extent required by law, in the language understood by the applicant or recipient, of the availability of services designed to assist individuals to identify, escape, or stop future domestic abuse as well as to overcome the effects of domestic abuse. During the annual budget process, the CDSS must update the Legislature at hearings regarding

the number of CalWORKs welfare-to-work recipients, aggregated by county, who have been identified as potential victims of domestic abuse during the online CalWORKs appraisal process.

**Proposed Law:** Specific provisions of the bill would:

- Require CDSS to align the CalWORKs family violence option and gender-based violence provisions with, and not be more restrictive than, the federal requirements and option concerning survivors of abuse provided for in the federal TANF program and must, to the fullest extent permitted, maximize protections afforded to survivors of abuse.
- Require CDSS to issue regulations, no later than January 1, 2028, on updated protocols, as specified, on handling cases in which applicants and recipients are past or present victims of abuse.
- Require a county to waive, on a case-by-case basis, a CalWORKs program requirement for an applicant or recipient who has been identified as a past or present victim of domestic abuse for good cause, as specified.
- Require CDSS, in conjunction with counties, advocates, and current or former recipient survivors, to develop statewide standards for determining when there is good cause to issue a waiver.
- Prohibit, when reviewing waiver eligibility, a county from considering participation hours in domestic violence, mental health, or substance disorder services that contribute to the individual meeting any required participation hours as a basis for denying a waiver; prohibit a county from denying a waiver because a survivor does not receive or participate in services from a victim service provider; and prohibit a county from discontinuing a waiver on the basis that a survivor chooses to voluntarily participate in welfare-to-work activities.
- Require a county to reevaluate a waiver every six months and permit a county to reevaluate a waiver more frequently based upon the applicant or recipient's report of changed circumstances.
- Require a county to provide certain notices to each applicant or recipient regarding waivers.
- Require, on or before January 1, 2027, the CDSS, in consultation with stakeholders, including, but not limited to, federally recognized state domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, other domestic abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment advocates, and public benefits advocates, to develop both of the following:
  - A uniform set of written materials to be used statewide that addresses all relevant information and necessary requirements designed to assist individuals to identify, escape, or stop future abuse, overcome the effects of abuse, and make informed decisions, as specified.

- A standardized waiver request form that allows an applicant or recipient to identify the specific program requirements that they need waived, as specified.
- Require, on or before January 1, 2028, the CDSS to automate CalSAWS and provide the written materials and standardized waiver request form on BenefitsCal to ensure that technology is fully utilized to ensure that applicants and recipients who are abuse survivors have access to that information and receive the assistance they need.
- Revise the components of the required CDSS annual updates to the Legislature.

**-- END --**