

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

CSA1 Bill Id:AB 969 Author:(Celeste Rodriguez)

As Amended Ver:September 5, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Makes numerous changes to California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) protocols for waiving welfare-to-work program requirements for past or present survivors of abuse.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Delay implementation to January 1, 2027, for the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to develop protocols. Require CDSS protocols to specify how counties must issue timely and adequate notice of action when discontinuing a waiver that includes the specific reason(s) for termination.
- 2) Permits CDSS to issue an all-county letter to implement provisions of this bill.
- 3) Revise the timeline for a county to reevaluate the waiver to every six months and allow more frequently based upon the recipient's report of changed circumstances.
- 4) Remove the requirement that a county must provide an adequate written notice of action regarding the waiver request by the time of application in 10 days, and instead, prohibit a county from taking any adverse action against a recipient for noncompliance with a program requirement while a waiver request is pending for that program requirement.
- 5) Prohibit waivers of time limits granted to be implemented if federal statutes or regulations clarify that abuse victims are included in the 20% hardship exemptions and that no good cause waivers of the 20% limit will be granted to the state for victims of abuse, thereby incurring a penalty to the state.
- 6) Prohibit waivers of the work requirements from being implemented if federal statutes or regulations clarify that the state will be penalized for failing to meet work participation requirements due to granting waivers to abuse victims.
- 7) Require a county to waive a 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. Permits counties to utilize standards, procedures, and protocols currently available and shall identify them in its county plan. Waivers shall be reevaluated in accordance with other routine periodic reevaluations by the county.
- 8) Require all CalWORKs applicants and recipients shall 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.
- 9) Delay implementation of provisions of the bill to January 1, 2028, or when CDSS notifies the Legislature that the Statewide Automated Welfare System can perform the necessary automation to implement this section, whichever date is later.

COMMENTS

CalWORKs is the state's primary cash assistance program. CalWORKs implements the federal TANF program and provides eligible low-income families with cash grants and supportive services aimed at helping them to secure education, training, and employment. Among others, the supportive services include mental health counseling, substance use disorder treatment, or domestic violence services; job skills training; attendance in a secondary school or in a course leading to a certificate of general educational development.

As of October 2024, the maximum monthly grant for a family of three on CalWORKs (one parent and two children), if the family has no other income and lives in a high cost-of-living county, is \$1,039. In 2024-25, the administration estimates the average CalWORKs grant amount to be \$1,001 per month across all family sizes and income levels. CalWORKs recipients are often also eligible to receive supportive services and resources, such as subsidized child care, employment training, mental health counseling, and housing assistance.

CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Requirement. Unless deemed exempt, an adult in a one-parent assistance unit is required to participate in welfare-to-work activities for an average of 30 hours per week or, in the case of someone who is pregnant or parenting a child under six years of age, an average of 20 hours per week, monthly. In a two-parent assistance unit, one or both adults must participate in welfare-to-work activities for a combined average of 35 hours per week. Welfare-to-work activities include participation in subsidized and unsubsidized employment, community service, adult basic education, community college, job skills, training, mental health counseling, substance use disorder treatment, domestic abuse services, or other activities necessary to assist recipients in obtaining employment. If a CalWORKs recipient who is not exempt from participation does not meet the welfare-to-work requirements, the recipient may be sanctioned, and that recipient's portion of the family's grant may be subtracted from the amount provided to the family.

Prior to 2011, CalWORKs recipients could receive cash aid for up to 60 months, which aligned with federal rules. During recessionary state budget cuts, the maximum time on aid was reduced to 48-months and a 24-month time clock for welfare-to-work was created through SB 1041 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 47, Statutes of 2012. However, AB 79 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 11, Statutes of 2020, restored the 60-month lifetime limit on receipt of benefits for qualified individuals and removed the 24-month limit on welfare-to-work activities. The changes made by AB 79 took effect on May 1, 2022.

Welfare-to-Work Exemptions. CalWORKs participants may be granted exemptions that excuse them from welfare-to-work requirements. These exemptions can include, but are not limited to, pregnancy, domestic violence, a disability that will last 30 days or more, providing foster care, being less than 16 years of age (or less than 19 years of age if attending school full time) or more than 60 years of age, or for the care of an infant or a young child. If exempt, a person can still voluntarily participate in the program to be able to access supportive services offered through the welfare-to-work program. CalWORKs recipients exempt from welfare-to-work activities may choose at any time to voluntarily participate in welfare-to-work activities or choose to end this participation, without loss of eligibility for CalWORKs aid, as long as the recipient's exemption status does not change in a way that would require their participation. Currently, individuals receiving CalWORKs can receive an exemption from participation in welfare-to-work activities

if they are a parent or other relative who has primary, personal responsibility for caring for an infant in the first 12 weeks, six months, or 12 months after birth.

CalWORKs Program Waivers. Currently, CalWORKs applicants and recipients who are past or present victims of domestic violence may qualify for certain exceptions to the typical welfare-to-work requirements and time limits. However, waivers are not offered broadly, and some counties require that social workers explore with the recipient ways to meet their safety and confidentiality needs while also promoting their self-sufficiency. Further, some counties explicitly instruct social workers not to assume all domestic violence victims need a waiver. Both practices are consistent with existing law.

Sponsors of this bill report that domestic violence waivers are being tied to the welfare-to-work processes when waivers might be needed upfront and not during employment services. For example, establishing paternity and child support cooperation agreements. This means that an applicant could, in theory, be denied because they are unable to establish paternity due to escaping violence. Waivers should be available at any time and can retroactively apply.

In addition to waivers needed up front for eligibility, good cause determinations can be made when recipients are beginning their required activities for welfare-to-work. According to CDSS good cause means a CalWORKs client has a temporary, good reason not to participate in their welfare-to-work activity. The CDSS Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) section 42-715.5 provides which CalWORKs program requirements counties may waive for a recipient who has been identified as a past or present victim of domestic abuse, when good cause has been established. Some specific requirements counties cannot waive include: asset, income, and deprivation requirements. Counties may waive: paternity establishment, time limit, work, education, and child support requirements. The MPP also requires counties to develop criteria for waiving requirements and states that counties can establish the duration of welfare-to-work and time limit waivers, as long as the granting of such waivers comply with the state and federal regulations. Examples of what may constitute good cause for not participating in welfare-to-work activities for victims of domestic violence, but are not limited to:

- 1) Currently fleeing the abuser and is in temporary housing or homeless;
- 2) Recently entered a shelter;
- 3) Concerned about the safety of their children;
- 4) The participant is party to a restraining order or divorce action against the abuser; and,
- 5) Undergoing counseling to cope with the side effects of the abuse, including children.

This bill is attempting to make it easier for victims to get waivers by providing written materials so recipients know what is available and by removing the broad discretion of counties.

Equity Implications: According to the 2015 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, about one in four women reported experiencing sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner and reported an interpersonal violence related impact during their lifetime. Additional data on domestic or intimate partner violence includes the following:

- 1) Approximately four in every ten non-Hispanic Black women, four in every ten American Indian or Alaska Native women, and one in two multiracial non-Hispanic women reported being the victim of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. These rates are 30-50% higher than those experienced by Hispanic, White non-Hispanic and Asian or Pacific Islander non-Hispanic women.
- 2) Women with disabilities have a 40% greater risk of intimate partner violence than women without disabilities.

This bill may create additional opportunities for an individual to escape domestic violence by making it easier to understand waiver availability and expand eligibility.

According to the Author

"CalWORKs provides cash assistance and benefits to qualified low-income families. Victims of abuse qualify for a waiver of specific program requirements, but the process to getting that waiver is convoluted, causing many victims to miss out on this waiver. For example, a waiver on the time limit on aid may be available. Survivors of domestic abuse can remain on aid longer than the state and federal maximum time limits if granted an exception or an exemption. [This bill] would remove barriers experienced by survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and stalking when applying for and accessing CalWORKs. Specifically, [this bill] would make changes so that domestic violence waivers are no longer conditional on welfare-to-work program requirements. By making these changes, survivors are empowered to request and receive accommodations for the CalWORKs program requirements. Families that have suffered abuse and qualify for this waiver should not have additional hurdles to deal with when accessing the benefits that they qualify for."

Arguments in Support

The Women's Foundation California Solis Policy Institute, the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, the Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, and the Western Center on Law & Poverty write, "Passing [this bill] will ensure that California maximizes the protections afforded to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and stalking in the CalWORKs program. Survivors should not have to navigate restrictive and outdated policies while seeking stability for themselves and their children while escaping or recovering from harm. This bill is an essential step toward increasing the safety and economic security of vulnerable families. By making it easier for survivors to access and maintain critical CalWORKs benefits, California will help empower survivors with the resources they need to move forward."

Arguments in Opposition

No opposition on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee on August 29, 2025:

- 1) Unknown ongoing General Fund costs due to an increase in months of benefits provided.
- 2) Unknown General Fund costs for automation.
- 3) No fiscal impact to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for state administration.

- 4) 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.

VOTES:**ASM HUMAN SERVICES: 6-0-0**

YES: Lee, Castillo, Calderon, Elhawary, Jackson, Celeste Rodriguez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

UPDATED

VERSION: September 5, 2025

CONSULTANT: Alexandria Smith / HUM. S. / (916) 319-2089

FN: 0001934