

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Buffy Wicks, Chair
SB 290 (Smallwood-Cuevas) – As Amended July 17, 2025

Policy Committee: Human Services

Vote: 7 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill repeals the requirement that California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) applicants and recipients provide documentation that each child who is not required to be in school has received all age appropriate immunizations, and revises the notice requirements advising families of their obligation to secure immunizations.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Beginning July 1, 2026, or when the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) notifies the Legislature that the Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) can perform the necessary automation, whichever date is later:
 - a) Repeals the requirement that CalWORKs applicants and recipients submit documentation showing the children in their households are immunized and the related prohibition on considering the needs of parents or caretaker relatives in determining the cash grant to the assistance unit until the required documentation is provided.
 - b) Repeals the corresponding requirement that, at the time of application and the next redetermination of eligibility for aid, notice be given to all CalWORKs applicants and recipients advising them of their obligation to secure immunizations for all children in the assistance units not required to be in school.
 - c) Instead requires notice be given to all CalWORKs applicants and recipients advising them of the obligation under existing law 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.
 - d) Requires the immunization notice referenced in item c, above, to contain a description of how to obtain immunizations through Medi-Cal, a county public health clinic, or any other source that may be available in the county as appropriate.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) CDSS estimates ongoing General Fund (GF) costs of approximately \$9.2 million annually, for increased cash aid grants for CalWORKs families who currently have an immunization penalty. CDSS estimates an average of 3,134 adults receive the immunization penalty annually.

- 2) CDSS estimates one-time GF automation costs of \$1.2 million in 2026-27, and \$59,000 annually ongoing.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the Author:

California's CalWORKs program serves as a crucial safety net for families experiencing financial hardship by ensuring that children and their caregivers receive essential support to meet basic needs. Unfortunately, under existing law, aid eligibility requires a parent or caretaker to provide immunization documentation, which many low-income families do not have, and if not produced harms the very children whose health is the focus of the immunization requirement, by cutting the family's CalWORKs aid. [This bill] seeks to remove this barrier to ensure that families in need are not penalized for administrative challenges unrelated to their economic struggles. [This bill] shifts the focus from penalization to education, ensuring that CalWORKs recipients are fully informed of existing immunization mandates for school-aged children.

- 2) **Background.** CalWORKs, the state's largest anti-poverty program, provides eligible low-income families with cash grants and supportive services and resources, such as subsidized child care, employment training, mental health counseling, and housing assistance, aimed at moving children out of poverty and helping qualified low income families meet their basic needs.

Existing state law requires every applicant for, and every recipient of, CalWORKs benefits to provide documentation that every child in the assistance unit not required to be enrolled in school has received all age-appropriate immunizations. An applicant or recipient may be exempt from this requirement if they submit documentation from a healthcare professional that an immunization is not appropriate for medical reasons, or if the applicant or recipient has filed with the county welfare department an affidavit stating immunizations are contrary to the applicant's or recipient's beliefs.

CalWORKs applicants must provide proof of immunization within 30 days of approval for Medi-Cal or within 45 days from date of application for CalWORKs if a person is already enrolled in Medi-Cal. CalWORKs recipients must submit documentation within 45 days of the county notifying the recipient that proof of immunization is required. If the applicant or recipient does not meet the specified deadline, the family is "sanctioned," whereby their cash aid is reduced by the parent or caretaker relative's share until the required documentation is provided. CDSS indicates an average of 3,134 adults receive this immunization penalty annually.

Existing state law also requires counties to provide applicants and recipients a notice advising them of their obligation to secure immunizations for each child not required to be in school. The notice must include recommended childhood immunization schedules, as specified, and information on obtaining immunizations using Medi-Cal or through a county public health clinic or other available sources, and a statement indicating the applicant or recipient may file an affidavit claiming the immunizations are contrary to their beliefs.

This bill repeals the CalWORKs requirement that a child not required to be enrolled in school must be immunized and the accompanying sanctions on families who fail to provide timely immunization documentation.

This bill also revises the notice provided to applicants and recipients regarding immunizations by deleting the existing requirement and instead requiring notice of the existing-law obligation for children admitted to school or a childcare setting to secure immunizations required for admission. The notice must still contain a description of how to obtain the immunizations through Medi-Cal, a county public health clinic, or other available source in the county, but not the recommended childhood immunization schedules and the now-irrelevant statement indicating an applicant or recipient may file an affidavit claiming immunizations are contrary to their beliefs.

- 3) **Related Legislation.** AB 1074 (Patel), of this legislative session, among other provisions, requires a CalWORKs sanction imposed for failing to verify the immunization of a child to end upon the removal of the child from the assistance unit and their placement into out-of-home care. AB 1074 is pending hearing in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

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