

Date of Hearing: July 16, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 778 (Limón) – As Introduced February 21, 2025

Policy Committee: Human Services

Vote: 7 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill revises income eligibility requirements for migrant childcare services and specifies the documentation necessary to establish current income eligibility, including self-certification of income.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Revises the definition of a “migrant agricultural worker family” to mean a family with at least one individual who has earned at least 40% of their total gross income from employment in fishing, agriculture, or agricultural-related work during the 12-month period immediately preceding the date of application for childcare and development services.
- 2) Specifies the individual may obtain and provide documentation necessary to establish their current income eligibility from either month of the two-month window immediately preceding the initial certification or the recertification of eligibility for services.
- 3) Requires documentation to consist of a self-certification of income, as defined, and, if reasonably necessary to determine income, a copy of the most recently signed and completed tax return with a statement of current estimated income for tax purposes.

FISCAL EFFECT:

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) indicates that decreasing the qualifying income threshold to 40% pursuant to this bill will make additional families eligible for the California Migrant Childcare and Development Program (CMIG) and the California Migrant Alternative Payment Program (CMAP), but the department lacks sufficient data to gauge the exact fiscal impact of this change. However, based on current program characteristics, CDSS estimates the following ongoing General Fund costs:

- 1) For every 100 newly eligible children enrolled in CMIG, costs will be approximately \$2.1 million annually, at an estimated cost of \$20,124 for each new enrollment.
- 2) For every 100 newly eligible children enrolled in CMAP, costs will be approximately \$1.4 million annually, at an estimated cost of \$13,254 for each new enrollment.

COMMENTS:

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

With over one-third of farmworkers in our country residing in California, ensuring access to essential resources and supportive services for agricultural working families is crucial for the state's well-being. In addition, childcare challenges continue to grow in the state, becoming a key factor for lost wages of working agricultural parents. [This bill] seeks to address childcare needs by expanding access to the CMIG, providing greater support for families in the agricultural sector.

This bill is sponsored by the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation.

- 2) **Background.** The Child Care and Development Services Act requires CDSS to administer childcare and development programs. California's subsidized childcare system provides assistance for income-eligible parents and guardians who are working, in training, seeking employment, incapacitated, or in need of respite through a number of programs.

CMIG offers childcare and development services to eligible agricultural working families. CMIG serves children from birth through 12 years of age, including older children with exceptional needs, through childcare centers and family childcare home networks operated or administered by public or private agencies and local educational agencies. CMIG is funded through a combination of federal and state resources and provides culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate care for the children served. This program also provides meals and snacks to children, and referrals to health and social services for agricultural families.

CMAF provides vouchers to eligible agricultural working families to purchase childcare and development services from providers throughout California's Central Valley. Funding for services follows families as they move from place to place for agricultural work.

Under existing law, to qualify for these programs a family must be a "migrant agricultural worker family," defined as a family that has earned at least 50% of its total gross income from employment in fishing, agriculture, or agriculturally related work during the 12-month period immediately preceding the date of application for child care and development services. This bill revises this definition to instead require a family to have at least one individual who has earned 40% of their total gross income from such employment.

Existing regulations require specific income documentation for determining eligibility for these programs, with self-certification allowed only when income cannot be verified through other means. This bill instead allows self-certification of income, with tax returns and estimated income statements used as additional verification if reasonably necessary, and allows a family to establish income eligibility by using documentation from either month of a two-month window, rather than from 12 months, as specified.

The author and sponsor assert the eligibility and income verification changes in this bill will expand access to childcare services and, thus, better support working agricultural families.