



April 21, 2021

To: The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1

From: Cathy Senderling-McDonald, Executive Director

**RE: CWDA COMMENTS ON CALWORKS AND CALFRESH
PROGRAMS BUDGET PROPOSALS**

As part of the annual budget process, the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) typically comments or takes positions on budget proposals from the Administration or advocates that are of policy interest to our members or that have an effect on county operations. Because of the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the annual state budget hearing process, we have been unable to provide our feedback through public testimony as we usually would. Therefore, we are providing feedback here on several CalFresh and CalWORKs budget proposals that we have not already commented on in writing elsewhere.

CalWORKs

CalWORKs Maximum Aid Payment Increase

The Governor's Budget includes an increase of 1.5 percent to the Maximum Aid Payment (MAP), effective October 1, 2021. This increase will bring MAP levels to \$891 per month for an assistance unit of three living in a high-cost county. This is part of a multi-year strategy to ensure that all CalWORKs families live above 50 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The MAP increase set for October 2021 would bring families to 49 percent of the 2020 Federal Poverty Level. CWDA was active in discussions and negotiations during the 2018-19 budget cycle to support ending deep poverty in the CalWORKs program. Our association continues

to support increasing the spending power of our CalWORKs recipients via grant increases, including but not limited to this proposed increase.

CalWORKs Time On Aid

CWDA supports the Administration's proposal to provide \$18.2 million in 2020-21 and \$46.1 million in 2021-22 to continue to exempt any month or partial month of CalWORKs aid or services from counting toward the CalWORKs 48-month time limit based on a good-cause exemption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This applies to all current CalWORKs recipients, unless they have already exceeded the federal time-on-aid limit or otherwise have another clock stopper or time-on-aid extender in place. The COVID-19 pandemic has limited many of our clients' ability to work and will continue to have impacts on CalWORKs families for the foreseeable future. Allowing for these months on aid to not count against their lifetime limit is necessary in order to truly prepare our families for success after their exit from the program.

CalWORKs Outcome and Accountability Review (Cal-OAR)

The 2019 budget included trailer bill language directing the department to form a stakeholder work group to recommend CalWORKs policy changes that are consistent with the goals of the CalWORKs Outcome and Accountability Review (Cal-OAR) program. We understand that the department will be forwarding those recommendations to the Legislature. CWDA led the original effort to establish the Cal-OAR program in statute and we remain strongly committed to the process. We look forward to engaging on the specific recommendations.

CalFresh

CalFresh Student Eligibility Expansion

Counties are excited about the federal temporary expansion of CalFresh student eligibility so college students can access a sustained source of nutritious food, which is critical for their academic learning, success, and well-being. We also appreciate the \$11.8 million GF provided to counties in the current year to address the workload associated with this needed expansion. As our higher education institutions continue to outreach to students through the fall, we expect students to apply for CalFresh as they are made aware of their eligibility, leading to a potentially significant number of applications for counties to support and process, while also supporting the continued increase of non-student CalFresh applications driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that the temporary college student expansion will be in effect until 30 days after the COVID-19 public health emergency is lifted at the federal level, we anticipate this workload continuing through the budget year. Therefore, CWDA will be seeking funds for this workload and we continue to engage with the Administration to ensure adequate funding to address the continued workload for the budget year is provided

in the May Revision.

Advocate Proposals With Potential Automation Implications

The following CalWORKs and CalFresh proposals come from advocates and were heard by the budget subcommittees in both the Assembly and Senate. While CWDA is supportive of the merit and policy goals behind many of these proposals, further discussions are necessary to assess the automation impacts and timing considerations of changes being implemented. Because counties are in the midst of the federally mandated migration to a single CalSAWS automation system that must be completed by the end of 2023 to avoid the loss of significant federal funding, we urge policy makers to consult with CWDA and SAWS to coordinate implementation timing and procedures.

While some policies may be able to be automated during the migration period, and some could potentially be enacted manually until automation can be accomplished, many could not be implemented during this period without disrupting the CalSAWS migration schedule and/or already established policy commitments, and are therefore not feasible to implement prior to automation. Furthermore, manual workarounds result in additional costs in the short term to implement; however, even with additional administrative, short-term funding, the workload associated with certain activities may be difficult for counties to undertake. CWDA appreciates opportunities to engage with legislative budget staff and stakeholders to address the automation and workload impacts of other proposals under consideration by the Legislature, including:

- CalWORKs Good Cause Clock Stopper
- Cal-OAR Policy Realignment Recommendations
- CalWORKs Sanction Reform to Achieve Program Equity
- Reforming CalWORKs Aid to Pregnant Parents
- Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence
- Repeal the 100 Hour Rule for CalWORKs Two Parent Families
- Food for All – Modernizing the California Food Assistance Program
- Simplified CalFresh Application for Older Adults and People with Disabilities and Ensuring Full Telephonic Access
- Alignment of the CalWORKs and CalFresh Rules for Beneficiaries with an Arrest Warrant
- Supplemental Nutrition Benefit/Transitional Nutrition Benefit Programs Replacement Benefit Parity
- Pausing Recertifications for Supplemental Nutrition Benefit/Transitional Nutrition Benefit Programs

Thank you for your consideration of our feedback. We are happy to provide more information about our comments on any of these issues at your request.

cc: Chris Woods, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Mareva Brown, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Jason Sisney, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Gail Gronert, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Renita Polk, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
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