



CWDA
Advancing Human Services
for the Welfare of *All* Californians

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February 3, 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: CASH ASSISTANCE FOR CALWORKS FAMILIES IN FAMILY
REUNIFICATION**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) respectfully requests \$9.0 million General Fund (GF) on an ongoing basis to provide CalWORKs cash assistance grants to eligible parents whose children have been temporarily removed from the home and placed into foster care, for a period of up to 180 days, while the families are engaging in reunification efforts with the county child welfare agency. This funding will enhance the ability of these parents to successfully reunify with their children.

The passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 429 (Chapter 111, Statutes of 2001) provided for the continuation of CalWORKs services, under specified circumstances, when a child has been removed from the home and placed into foster care. Any biological or adoptive parent whose eligible child or children have been removed from the home and placed into foster care while their CalWORKs case is open may be entitled to receive CalWORKs services if the county determines the services are necessary for family reunification and the parent has a family reunification plan. Children and parents participating in both programs are often referred to as CalWORKs Family Reunification (FR) families. Originally, the proposal behind AB 429 also would have continued the parents' cash grant along with the CalWORKs services while reunification services were being provided; however, that provision was ultimately not adopted.

Although continuation of the CalWORKs services is beneficial, removing cash assistance from a family that is already below the poverty line makes reunification harder to achieve, can destabilize the family and ultimately can result in the family becoming homeless. While the child

welfare agency cannot *remove* a child from a family due solely to homelessness, a judge cannot *reunify* a child to an unsheltered parent. The current statewide housing crisis and COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated how critical it is for families to remain housed and how difficult it is to find new housing once evicted. Eviction also can result in further destabilization through job loss and other resulting hardships for the family. The continuation of CalWORKs cash assistance can make the difference in the housing and financial stability of a family during the reunification period. This change will help remove known barriers to reunification for families in the foster care system, particularly CalWORKs families of color. Data indicate that families of color are particularly over-represented in foster care.

Last year, CWDA sponsored Senate Bill (SB) 1341 by Senator Hurtado, which would have provided for up to 180 days of cash assistance. SB 1341 unanimously passed both houses, but Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed the bill. The Governor did not express a policy disagreement with the bill, instead writing in his veto message that the costs associated with providing cash assistance “could be more appropriately addressed through the annual budget process.”

To that end, we respectfully request \$9.0 million GF annually to continue to provide cash assistance to CalWORKs families whose children have been temporarily removed from the home. In addition, we also request one-time funds of \$500,000 for CalSAWS automation costs for fiscal year 2022-23¹. This modest investment would provide greater financial stability to low-income families who depend on CalWORKs and whose children have been temporarily removed from the home, thereby improving reunification outcomes and promoting well-being for both children and parents. It is important that the state provide the funding necessary to safeguard vulnerable families, especially given the current pandemic and financial crises, and the sharp increase in housing costs that have occurred since the implementation of AB 429.

For all of these reasons, we urge your support for this request.

¹ (Due to the migration of the current three systems into one, the necessary automation work for this change could not begin before 2022-23, with implementation after CalSAWS migration is completed.)

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
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Committee on Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Rebecca Hamilton, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
Joe Shinstock, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Eric Dietz, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
David Stammerjohan, Office of Senator Talamantes-Eggman
Ana Melendez, Office of Assembly Member Arambula
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