



CWDA
Advancing Human Services
for the Welfare of All Californians



May 31, 2016

To: The Honorable Phil Y. Ting
Chair, Budget Conference Committee

Honorable Members, Budget Conference Committee

From: Frank J. Mecca, Executive Director, CWDA
Michael Herald, Legislative Advocate, WCLP

**RE: ITEM 5180: HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM –
SUPPORT ASSEMBLY VERSION**

The County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) and the Western Center on Law and Poverty (WCLP) respectfully urge your support of the Assembly action to lift the once in a lifetime restriction on the CalWORKs Homeless Assistance Program, making the assistance available once every twelve months. Homelessness and housing instability are critical barriers to self-sufficiency and to the health and well-being of children, families, and society, and addressing them is a priority for CWDA and WCLP. We support the proposal to modernize the program by eliminating the once-in-a-lifetime limitation.

The CalWORKs Homeless Assistance Program provides temporary and permanent homeless assistance to families who are receiving or are eligible to receive CalWORKs. Temporary HA can provide payments for a shelter or hotel/motel for up to 16 consecutive days for families who are homeless and actively searching for permanent housing. Permanent HA can provide a family with payments to cover security and utility deposit costs, including the last month's rent, that enable the family to move into permanent housing. Permanent HA can also provide a payment of up to two months of rental arrearages to help a family with a "pay rent or quit" notice to avoid eviction. For both types of permanent HA, the family's rental cost cannot exceed 80 percent of the family's total monthly household income.

Having a CalWORKs homeless assistance program that works effectively is important for the state as it makes it more likely the family will fully participate in welfare to work activities. When a family becomes homeless the only thing that matters is solving that problem. It is unlikely that the adult will be able to maintain a work schedule, attend school or participate in other activities. Having an effective housing assistance program can prevent a gap in participation before it starts.

Homelessness remains one of the most difficult barriers for families in CalWORKs. While the program's caseload has leveled off and is beginning to decrease due to the improving economy, requests for homeless assistance remain steady. Further, the numbers of homeless families have risen by as much as 200 percent in the years between 2006 and 2015 (Los Angeles County data). The CalWORKs Homeless Assistance Program is an important tool counties use to assist families who are homeless or on the verge of becoming so.

Eliminating the once-in-a-lifetime restriction in the CalWORKs Homeless Assistance Program will enable counties to better meet the needs of impoverished California families who struggle in an extremely tight rental market. In the thirty years since the rule was put in place, we have learned many lessons about the causes of homelessness and effective strategies for combatting it. This rule is a barrier for families who experience a second episode of homelessness through no fault of their own. We thank you for your consideration of this request and for your continued support of California families.

cc: Gail Gronert, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Chris Woods, Office of the Assembly Speaker
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Cyndi Hillery, Assembly Republican Fiscal
Jennifer Troia, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Craig Cornett, Office of the Senate President Pro Tempore
Theresa Pena, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
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Will Lightbourne, Department of Social Services
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Amy Costa, Department of Finance
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Farrah McDaid-Ting, California State Association of Counties
County Caucus