



# CalWORKs Housing Support Program

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## Expand The CalWORKS Housing Support Program

### PROPOSAL

Increase funding for the CalWORKs Housing Support Program (HSP) by \$15 million in 2016-17. The HSP was conceived by the Legislature and Governor and enacted as part of the 2014-15 State Budget. It assists homeless families receiving CalWORKs by moving them directly out of homelessness and into permanent housing. In turn, stabilized housing supports families' efforts in reaching self-sufficiency. Currently funded at \$35 million, the HSP is expected to serve over 4,500 families which include 9,000 children in 44 counties. A \$15 million funding augmentation will enable the program to serve an additional estimated 1,900 families with 3,800 children in counties with existing programs and new counties wishing to participate.

### **A Lack of Stable Housing Undermines Other Efforts to Help Children and Families**

Research shows that safe and stable housing is essential to the well-being, health, and long term success of children and families. For children, homelessness contributes to impairments in cognitive development, physical health and emotional self-regulation, and interferes with learning and social relationships; the younger the child, the more devastating the consequences. For homeless parents, 84 percent of whom are single mothers, a lack of secure housing is both a result of and contributes to employment loss, depression, and physical health problems. The difficulties of job seeking as a person experiencing homelessness can be an insurmountable barrier to employment.

### **The CalWORKS Housing Support Program, Enacted by the Legislature and Governor, is a Proven Model**

HSP is founded on the housing first principle of rapid re-housing, an evidence-based model that gained national attention and support under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and is now promoted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

**BUDGET FACT SHEET | CALWORKS HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAM**

Development (HUD). Proven to be cost-effective and have better outcomes than other housing models, it moves families out of homelessness and into permanent housing. HSP has brought together a diverse group of housing and social services experts, including state and local agencies, nonprofit service providers, and key stakeholders and advocates in an innovative and collaborative effort to serve California's most disadvantaged families.

HSP continues to demonstrate success. In 2014-15, the program's first year, 20 counties helped nearly 4,000 children in 2,000 families obtain permanent housing, despite operating in one of the most difficult rental markets in the nation. In the current year, 2015-16, the program expanded to include an additional 24 counties.

**The Need and Demand for the CalWORKs Housing Support Program is High**

California accounts for 21 percent of the country's homeless population, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. This is an increase of one percentage point over the 2014 count, giving the Golden State the second largest year over year increase in the nation.

Homelessness among families in the CalWORKs program has increased dramatically. Los Angeles County alone saw homelessness in CalWORKs increase 149 percent between 2006 and 2013, while the CalWORKs caseload itself only grew by 15 percent during the same period. Even while the economy continues to recover from the Great Recession, homelessness among CalWORKs families remains persistent.

County Human Services agencies receive, on average, more than 4,000 requests for homeless assistance **each month**. While not all families who request assistance will meet HSP program criteria, this estimate is a useful proxy for unmet need throughout the state because it provides an estimate of the extent of homelessness in the CalWORKs program, not just within counties currently administering HSP. It is important to note that while HSP is operating in 44 counties, those counties have not received enough funding to serve all the homeless families potentially eligible for the program.

The high cost of housing in California contributes both to homelessness and poverty. The Public Policy Institute of California (2013) notes that "high living costs, particularly housing costs, offset the resources [families] have available to make ends meet." With the maximum aid payment for a family of three at a mere 45 percent of the federal poverty level, and the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment at \$1,341 per month, it is clear that poor families face incredibly large hurdles to self-sufficiency in California.

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The goals of CalWORKs are to reduce poverty, increase employment and self-sufficiency, and improve the well-being of children. Housing instability undermines each of these goals. However the need is quantified, it is clear that homelessness is a critical concern of families in the CalWORKs program. The HSP is a proven and successful solution to the problem of family homelessness, and increased funding is a cost-effective means for expanding its reach to an additional 1,900 families, providing a safe and stable home to over 3,800 more children.

This report was created by CWDA and Californians for Safety and Justice Staff. Direct questions to the contacts at right. For more information, visit:

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