



March 11, 2024

To: The Honorable Caroline Menjivar
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

The Honorable Dr. Corey Jackson
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2

From: Eileen Cubanski, Interim Executive Director, CWDA

**RE: CALIFORNIA WORK OPPORTUNITY AND
RESPONSIBILITY TO KIDS (CALWORKS) PROGRAM –
OPPOSITION TO THE ELIMINATION OF THE FAMILY
STABILIZATION PROGRAM**

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) opposes the Governor's Budget proposal to eliminate the CalWORKs Family Stabilization Program (FSP). The CalWORKs FSP serves CalWORKs families facing immediate, destabilizing crises. The proposed elimination would strip CalWORKs families of essential support, leading to even greater challenges in accessing the resources and services necessary to stabilize their lives and achieve self-sufficiency.

The FSP was established with the understanding that families in crisis often struggle to engage in typical welfare-to-work activities due to the urgency of their situations. By prioritizing stability, policymakers, counties, and individuals with lived experiences came together to create the FSP, aiming to provide thoughtful support and resources for families in need. This program aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, recognizing that addressing fundamental needs such as food, shelter, and safety is essential for families to progress towards personal growth and self-sufficiency.

County staff work closely with CalWORKs families to identify their immediate needs and provide services to address barriers experienced by the families. These services extend beyond intensive case management, housing, behavioral health, and domestic violence

support to include legal assistance, parenting classes, utility and car repair payments, assistance with navigating bureaucratic processes, and more. A majority of counties also work within a multi-disciplinary team, collaborating with other partner agencies, service providers, and community organizations to provide a whole person care approach and wraparound services and resources to address families' needs. Additionally, the FSP takes a whole-family approach, providing support not only to parents but also to children, ensuring that the entire family receives the assistance they need; this includes educational supports to children and child welfare co-case management. In the most recent release of June 2023 data, one-third of the FSP services were provided to children.

The impact of the FSP on CalWORKs families cannot be overstated. Counties report that FSP is another tool to use as the needs of CalWORKs families get more complex and additional income is just one piece of what participants require. Specifically, counties report that over 80 percent of CalWORKs families on FSP receive services in more than one category in the most recent two fiscal years (FYs) (FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23). Counties have observed firsthand and have collected numerous success stories illustrating how the FSP has:

- Assisted families in rebuilding after a history of trauma through one-on-one and group counseling services, in conjunction with training courses.
- Supported parents who recently regained custody of their children to avoid incarceration by providing the parents and children with the necessary skills to confront trauma and meet requirements from probation or the child welfare program.
- Helped survivors of domestic violence who face significant barriers such as job and housing loss due to past domestic violence incidents in the home and arrest records. Through the FSP, families receive legal aid to expunge their records and housing assistance to support their journeys towards personal and career advancement.
- Connected families to other support programs, from In-Home Support Services for a parent needing extensive support for an autistic child, to grief counseling and support groups for a parentified truant teen who is working to deal with the death of a parent.
- Provided intensive case management with trained practitioners that understand that the parent with a substance use disorder may need outpatient treatment multiple times throughout their lifetime.

Counties have regarded the FSP as a model for effectively engaging families, prompting legislative proposals aimed at expanding its reach. Since FY 2015-16, counties have spent the entire statewide allocation and, when possible, some invested additional Single Allocation funds above the statewide allocation to meet clients' needs and provide FS services. The program's success underscores the critical importance of maintaining and investing in the program to continue serving vulnerable families across the state. At its peak, the FSP supported over 12,500 CalWORKs families a month, demonstrating its significant impact on communities statewide.

Concluding Remarks

California has demonstrated a particular focus on families, prioritizing areas such as housing, homelessness, and behavioral health. The FSP plays a vital role in addressing these priorities, as county human services departments serve the poorest and most vulnerable Californians, who often have unique and complex needs. Looking ahead, the implementation of the Federal Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 introduces new metrics, focusing on employment and retention. However, as we understand from evidence, addressing basic needs and safety is essential to achieving future and lasting self-sufficiency. While there is excitement about potential policy changes, it's crucial to recognize that the FSP remains a cornerstone in addressing these fundamental needs.

As counties work to implement policy changes and there is the possibility of federally-recognized new accountability metrics, such as family well-being, it is imperative to maintain accessible, supportive, person-centered, and accountable programs like the FSP. Failure to do so will jeopardize our ability to meet the evolving needs of CalWORKs families and hinder our progress toward a more equitable and thriving community for all Californians.

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
Kelsy Castillo, Office of the Speaker of the Assembly
Elizabeth Schmitt, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Committee on Budget Subcommittee No. 2
Kirk Feely, Senate Republican Fiscal Office
Joe Shinstock, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Krista Pfefferkorn, Office of Senator Weiner
Kimberly Fuentes, Office of Senator Menjivar
Dubrea Sanders, Office of Assembly Member Jackson
Ginni Bella Navarre, Legislative Analyst's Office
Richard Figueroa, Office of the Governor
Angela Pontes, Office of the Governor
Marko Mijic, Health and Human Services Agency
Kim Johnson, California Department of Social Services
Kris Cook, HHS, Department of Finance
Justin Garrett, California State Association of Counties
County Caucus