



AB 2052 (QUIRK-SILVA): CALWORKS AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

SUMMARY

AB 2052 would extend the CalWORKs age threshold one year for eligible youth attending high school or vocational training on a full-time basis.

BACKGROUND

In the 1990s, Federal reform created the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which permits states to implement the program under a state plan. California established CalWORKs, which the Legislature declared its intent was to reduce child poverty in the state.

CalWORKs is one of the state's largest anti-poverty programs. Families that apply and qualify for ongoing assistance, receive money each month to help pay for housing, food and other necessary expenses. The amount of a family's monthly assistance payment depends on a number of factors. Specific eligibility requirements include an applicant's citizenship, age, income, resources, assets as well as other factors.

In California, almost 60 percent of students are identified as low income. Poor (bottom 20 percent of all family incomes) students were five times more likely to drop out of high school than the top 20 percent of family income. And poverty rates for Black and Brown families are three times the rates for white families.

California students may obtain a free public education through the age of 21. Students may be faced with a number of circumstances that keep them in school for an extended period. Students with disabilities or learning needs may need a little more time to obtain their diplomas.

Social and economic-related reasons including students who started high school at a later age or move around and fall behind. These students include immigrant children whose prior education does not qualify in California, foster youth, and children of migrant families who must follow the crops. There are also students who have had traumatic events happen whether transition in their legal care or experiences of domestic violence in the household.

Additionally, the pandemic has not only resulted in lost learning, but many students have dropped out to work to help their families. Other students were not able to participate in virtual learning due to lack of resources including technology and internet, became homelessness or housing insecure, or suffered from stress and anxiety.

However, in order to support their education, the state needs to also extend current financial and health benefit programs to eligible students over the age of 19 who continue to attend high school or vocational-related programs.

California has made strides in this area including, but not limited to:

- Increasing age eligibility from 18 to 22 for youth receiving Medi-Cal health benefits.
- Increasing age eligibility to receive CalFresh, another benefit program for families and individuals who are food insecure.

It is vital that we provide all the tools available to students to not only succeed academically, but to make sure the students have access or maintain resources and benefits available to them.

SOLUTION

AB 2052 would extend age eligibility for CalWORKs assistance if the youth is: 1) eligible, 2) attending high school or vocational training on a full-time basis and, 3) reasonable expected to complete educational or training program before the youth's 20th birthday. This mirrors many of the support benefits provided to eligible low-income families in California.

SUPPORT

- Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations (CCWRO) (Co-Sponsors)
- Western Center on Law & Poverty (Co-Sponsors)

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