



ASSEMBLYMEMBER JOAQUIN ARAMBULA, M.D. 31ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 310 – CalWORKs Reimagined

Summary

AB 310 will provide all parents with critical supports they need to ensure economic security for their children and themselves. It will reimagine CalWORKs to ensure that the program puts families first and undoes the harm from racist and sexist federal and state law.

Background

CalWORKs (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids) is California's version of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) welfare program and supports more than 300,000 families throughout the state.¹ CalWORKs is California's primary program to help families with children that are struggling to secure a basic income to meet their needs. However, CalWORKs parents face a labor market in which gender- and race-based discrimination are ongoing, as well as workplace expectations and practices that make it difficult for parents to balance work with caregiving responsibilities. These dynamics significantly affect CalWORKs parents, who are predominantly women, people of color, and parents of young children.

State CalWORKs policy continues to threaten counties with financial penalties tied to the federally-defined Work Participation Rate (WPR), incentivizing counties and caseworkers to direct CalWORKs participants away from supportive activities to address barriers that do not fully count toward meeting the federal WPR. Removing this threat of financial penalty, as part of broader changes to eliminate sanctions, expand eligible work activities, and tailor engagement to parent's individual needs will better align state policy with the CalWORKs program's current focus, facilitating full implementation of strategies designed to effectively support parents and families in securing long-term stability and well-being.

It is critical that our state act now to remove aspects of the CalWORKs program that were based on historic and non-equitable stereotypes of welfare recipients, and instituting program changes that recognizes where our state's diverse population is now and their needs, to help them succeed.

¹ [Undercutting the Needs of California Families: The Harm of Racist, Sexist Work Requirements & Penalties in CalWORKs](#)

AB 310 represents a moral commitment to reimagine the program away from the racist, sexist, and classist origins in the 1996 PRWORA led by Rep. Gingrich and 1997 imposition of CalWORKs under then-Gov. Pete Wilson.

Current Law

California's CalWORKs policy continues to threaten counties with financial penalties tied to the federally-defined WPR, incentivizing counties and caseworkers to direct CalWORKs participants away from supportive activities to address barriers that do not fully count toward meeting the federal WPR. Current law assumes that the family is incapable of making decisions of what they need and empowers the county to make those decisions rather than the family.

Recent state reforms to CalWORKs, such as CalWORKs 2.0 and Cal-OAR, are designed to improve the program's capacity to effectively focus on supporting parents to identify goals, address barriers, and secure durable improvements in economic stability and family well-being.²

This Bill

AB 310:

- 1) Removes the pejorative, racist language from the statutory scheme and inserts family-centered, empowering, anti-racist language in its place;
- 2) Revises the sanction policy to reflect anti-racist and family-centered values and ensure that California's anti-poverty programs are focused on family well-being;
- 3) Revises the welfare-to-work scheme to:
 - a. Enable counties to quickly provide the services and supports families need that the families want,
 - b. Reflect anti-racist values,
 - c. Move from a penalty-focused program to one which empowers families and respects their choices, and
 - d. Provide supportive and employment services tailored to family's individual circumstances and needs determined by the family
- 4) Eliminates the county work penalty pass through.

² [Harmful Obstacles: CalWORKs WPR Penalty](#)



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For More Information

K. Jones, Ph.D. (they/them)
Office of Assemblymember Dr. Arambula
K.Jones@asm.ca.gov or (916) 319-2031