



SB 773: The CalWORKs Homeless Assistance Program

Summary: This bill would expand eligibility by allowing counties to consider additional sources of income towards the CalWORKs Homeless Assistance program. In addition, this bill would require California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to collect data on applicants to this program and to form a working group to recommend best practices for data collection.

Background and Issue:

CalWORKs Homeless Assistance provides a temporary shelter program and a permanent housing program to assist CalWORKs recipients that are experiencing homeless or at-risk for becoming homeless. The permanent housing program can provide recipients the security deposit and last month's rent, or up to two months of rent arrearages to prevent eviction. Recipients may access this financial assistance once annually. To qualify for the permanent housing program, CalWORKs recipients must pay no more than 80% of their income towards rent.

However, this outdated requirement fails to consider increasing California rents relative to CalWORKs recipients' income. CalWORKs recipients are amongst the lowest-income Californians. For example, in Los Angeles County, a family of four cannot earn more than \$1,519 monthly if they receive the maximum aid payment (MAP) and only \$1,363 if they do not. As for assets, a family must have no more than \$10,888 in resources, or \$16,333 in resources if the family includes someone over 60 years old or with a disability.

Affordable housing in California is scarce and challenging to locate for a CalWORKs family. When the 80% threshold was established, it may have been more possible for CalWORKs recipients

to qualify for the permanent housing program. With current rents in California, the program's utilization is low. Between July 2021 and June 2022, over

75,000 applicants to the temporary shelter program within CalWORKs Homeless Assistance were approved. However, during this same time period, only 2,705 applicants were approved for the permanent housing program. The CDSS and advocates for CalWORKs recipients believe the program's low utilization is due to the challenging 80% threshold for applicants to meet.

Increasing county flexibility when evaluating an applicant's income would help more CalWORKs recipients qualify while ensuring they can reasonably afford to stay housed.

Existing Law:

Under current law, CalWORKs recipients applying to the permanent housing program within the Homeless Assistance program must pay no more than 80% of their income towards rent to qualify.

Proposal:

This bill would increase the flexibility counties have when determining whether a CalWORKs recipient qualifies for the Homeless Assistance permanent housing program by allowing government assistance, nonprofit assistance, and other forms of private assistance the family regularly receives to count as income for the purposes of this program.

In addition, this bill would require CDSS to regularly collect statewide data to determine the number of applicants to the CalWORKs Homeless Assistance program, whether the applicants are accepted or denied, the applicants' income level, and reason for denial. CDSS will be required to form a working group with relevant stakeholders to determine best practices for data collection on the Homeless Assistance program and how to better support CalWORKs recipients in identifying and maintaining permanent housing.

Support:

Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations

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