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DISTRICT 25

AB 283

Repeal CalWORKs Penalties

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SUMMARY

AB 283 removes regressive and ineffective financial penalties placed on families receiving California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) benefits. These financial penalties were established by the Pete Wilson Administration to help achieve worthwhile policy goals, but they do not work. In fact, these economic penalties increase the irreparable harm that vulnerable CalWORKs children are already enduring in deep poverty, making public health and educational attainment goals even further out of reach.

BACKGROUND

California law penalizes families receiving CalWORKs benefits by withholding a portion of their monthly grant if they are not compliant with certain program requirements. These financial penalties reduce a monthly grant that is already below half of the federal poverty line. For point of reference, a family of two in San Jose receives a monthly CalWORKs grant of just \$577. The penalty reduces this monthly grant by \$222/month on that family of two. This penalty increases the harm of poverty on poor children. Furthermore, these penalties have no effect on compliance with these requirements according to multiple studies. Meanwhile, these families are also subject to the same immunization and school attendance benchmarks established in the California Law that apply to all other families. AB 283 seeks to prevent CalWORKs families from being financially penalized for failing to meet existing standards for which other parents are not financially penalized. These laws were written with the assumption that poor families are in need additional oversight in order to ensure that children are cared for when there is no evidence that this is the case.

PROBLEM

Existing law (Sections 11253.5 and 11265.8 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to CalWORKs) purportedly seek to help low-income families and children achieve health and education benchmarks by taking away money from these already destitute families. Instead of supporting families in achieving these goals, the penalties create obstacles that further harm CalWORKs families and children. The policy goals that these code sections are trying to achieve can and should be addressed by mechanisms that do not treat CalWORKs families differently than other families.

SOLUTION

AB 283 will repeal Sections 11253.5 and 11265.8 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to CalWORKs, which removes duplicative requirements that specifically target CalWORKs families and push them further into poverty through ineffective financial penalties.

SPONSORS

Western Center on Law and Poverty
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations
Children's Defense Fund of California

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