



# Assemblymember Robert Rivas, 30<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

## AB 1728 – Parents and Healthy Child Development

### SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 1728 will exempt parents receiving CalWORKs benefits with children three years old or younger from mandatory participation in Welfare-to-Work (WTW) programs.

### BACKGROUND

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) administers the state’s welfare system for low-income residents, commonly known as CalWORKs. The CalWORKs system provides cash benefits for up to 48 months to individuals and families in need of assistance with specified requirements. One of those requirements is participation in the “Welfare-to-Work” (WTW) program. WTW activities include work-study, community service, mental health treatment, and vocational education, among other options.

Research shows that quality time between parents and their children is critical for childhood health and development. Quality time between parents and children is physically beneficial due to increased chance of breastfeeding and mentally beneficial due to stronger emotional connections. Unfortunately, families in poverty face several socioeconomic barriers and often are not able to spend quality time with their newborns due to the financial need to return to work soon after their child’s birth.

CalWORKs families live on an average fixed income of 42% of the federal poverty level. California’s children suffer the highest poverty levels in the nation, which leads to poorer child health outcomes. The American Academy for Pediatrics strongly recommends that babies breastfeed for up to 24 months or longer, and at least 10-12 times a day. Numerous studies have shown that babies that are breastfed have fewer and less severe stomach viruses, lower respiratory illnesses, ear infections, and meningitis. While breastfeeding is not as crucial for children in middle-class and wealthy families, babies living in poverty significantly benefit from breastfeeding to make up for the negative impacts of deep poverty.

### PROBLEM

Currently, a parent with a child under two years of age may get a once-in-a-lifetime WTW exemption of up to 24 months. However, the parent has to contact their social

worker and formally request the exemption. If the parent is unable to secure an exemption, they must find childcare and spend valuable time away from their baby to meet WTW requirements. Otherwise, they are penalized with a deduction of about 25% of their CalWORKs benefit.

To make matters worse, the current process for requesting an exemption is lengthy and oftentimes inaccessible. For instance, CalWORKs recipients in large counties do not have a designated social worker. In lieu of a calling their social worker, recipients must often spend hours trying to reach a call-center just to be granted an inadequate exemption period. Thus, CalWORKs recipients are often not able to transmit their exemption request at all and have to take time away from their baby during the most critical years in child development.

### SOLUTION

AB 1728 will automatically exempt parents with children three years old or younger from participation in WTW activities. Under this legislation, parents will receive a notice of action from their county informing them that they are exempt from the WTW program for the first three years of their child’s life. This legislation will also exempt the non-birthing parent of a two-parent couple receiving CalWORKs benefits for the first eight weeks of their child’s life. Lastly, AB 1728 will allow parents to voluntarily participate in any WTW programs by developing a plan with their county.

AB 1728 will uplift parents and promote healthy child development by allowing parents to spend more quality time with their children during the earliest and some of the most important years of their life.

### SUPPORT

- Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations (Sponsor)
- Western Center on Law and Poverty (Sponsor)

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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