



FACT SHEET: SB 996 – CalWORKs Accessibility Act

IN BRIEF

Senate Bill 996 expands accessibility for those currently on, and looking to apply, to the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program. Currently, asset tests unfairly discourage Californians from saving financially, while the 100 hour provision prohibits applicant parents from working over 100 hours/month, thereby discouraging the formation of two-parent families.

SB 996 addresses accessibility issues within the CalWORKs program by repealing the cash and vehicle asset tests and eliminating the 100 hour requirement.

BACKGROUND & PROBLEM

CalWORKs is California’s version of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The goal of the CalWORKs program is to sustain the family unit by providing monthly cash assistance and services to families in need. The average [2021-22](#) monthly monetary aid, across all family sizes and income levels, is estimated to be \$717. In order to qualify for the CalWORKs program, applicants must meet income and asset, or resource, test requirements. Specifically, asset tests measure the amount an applicant has in cash, accounts, bank, and other resources to determine eligibility.

As of June 1, 2020, the asset test limitations for CalWORKs were increased to a maximum of \$10,000 per household, or \$15,000 per household if it includes someone over 60 or disabled, and a non-exempt vehicle with an equity value of \$25,000 or less. While this was a milestone for protecting families in need, it is important to note that other state-funded programs, such as Medi-Cal and CalFresh, do not require asset tests. Asset tests unfairly discourage people that rely on CalWORKs benefits from saving their money, which can be used for a number emergency situations in the future.

CalWORKs also provides extra requirements for those looking to qualify for the program under a child’s loss of parental support, or [deprivation](#). Under current law, a parent working less than 100 hours in the four weeks following their CalWORKs assistance application is considered to be “depriving” their child of parental support or care – regardless of how much money the parent earns. Therefore, a parent in a two-parent family of four applying for CalWORKs and working on commission over 100 hours a month, but making less than \$200 or \$300 a month, is not eligible for CalWORKs. This is because the parent in a two-parent family is working over 100 hours a month. If the working parent leaves the family, then the newly formed family of three would be eligible for CalWORKs. The CalWORKs deprivation requirement effectively discourages the two-parent family unit.

SOLUTION

SB 996 will ensure equitable access to the CalWORKs program through both the elimination of asset tests and the 100 hour provision related to deprivation. These changes would improve the CalWORKs program overall, continue to increase accessibility to our state’s social programs, and also save the state millions of dollars in administrative costs.

Senate Bill 996 is a modest effort to strengthen the safety net for low-income working families of California, who today endure the highest poverty rate in the nation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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SUPPORT

- Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations (co-sponsor)
- Western Center on Law & Poverty (co-sponsor)