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CalWORKs Overview

LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

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Hon. Marty Block, Chair

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Program Overview

- CalWORKs Is California's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program.*** The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program was created in 1997 in response to the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation, which created the federal TANF program.
- CalWORKs Statutory Goals.*** The goals of CalWORKs are to:

 - Reduce child poverty in the state.
 - Achieve the four purposes of TANF, which include: (1) providing assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes; (2) ending the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and (4) encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.
- Primary Program Components.*** The CalWORKs program serves very low-income families with children. It consists of the following two main components:

 - ***Cash Assistance.*** CalWORKs families receive a monthly cash grant to help meet basic needs. In 2012-13, approximately 560,000 families received an estimated average monthly grant of \$468.
 - ***Welfare-to-Work.*** As a condition of receiving assistance, able-bodied adults are generally required to be employed or to participate in activities intended to lead to employment. In 2012-13, approximately 117,000 adults were working or participating in welfare-to-work activities through the CalWORKs program each month.



Work Requirement

- Work Requirement Consists of Allowable Activities.*** . . . State and federal law define different allowable activities for meeting the work requirement. As of January 2013, adults are limited to a cumulative 24 months of participation in activities as defined by state law. This 24-month limit is referred to as the “welfare-to-work 24-month time clock.” After 24 months of participation in activities allowable under state rules, adults must participate in activities defined by relatively less flexible federal rules.

- . . . And Minimum Hours of Weekly Participation.*** Adults are required to participate in allowable activities for a minimum number of hours each week. Specifically, the minimum requirement is 20 hours per week for single parents with children under six years of age, 30 hours a week for other single parents, and 35 hours per week for two-parent families.

- Supportive Services Provided to Enable Work.*** CalWORKs recipients who are subject to the work requirement are entitled to receive supportive services intended to enable participation, including subsidized child care and reimbursement for transportation and other expenses related to participating.

- Failure to Comply With Work Requirement Without Good Cause Results in Sanction.*** An adult subject to the work requirement who fails to comply without good cause is sanctioned by having the household’s grant reduced by the adult portion. Children in the household continue to receive cash assistance as long as the household continues to qualify. Sanctioned adults may cure their sanction by complying with the work requirement.

- Adult Time on Aid Is Limited.*** Adults are limited to a cumulative 48 months of cash assistance. After 48 months of assistance, the family’s grant is reduced by the adult portion. Children in the household continue to receive cash assistance as long as the household continues to qualify.



Welfare-to-Work 24-Month Time Clock



Prior to Exhausting 24 Months of Participation Under the Clock, Adults May Participate in Several Activities as Specified in State Law. These activities include:

- Unsubsidized employment.
- Subsidized employment.
- Unpaid work experience.
- Vocational education (often at a community college).
- Job search and job readiness.
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- Domestic violence services.
- Adult basic education.
- Attending secondary school or a general educational development (GED) course.



Once 24 Months of Participation Under the Clock Are Exhausted and Federal Rules Kick in. . .

- ***Some Activities Continue to Be Allowable and Are Unrestricted.*** Examples include unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, and unpaid work experience.
- ***Some Activities Continue to Be Allowable but Are Restricted as to Duration.*** Examples include vocational education (12 months) and mental health or substance abuse treatment (generally six weeks per year).
- ***Some Activities Continue to Be Allowable but Are Restricted as to Intensity.*** One example is attending secondary school or a GED course. In most cases, a participant could choose this activity, but only if she or he participated for at least 20 hours in unrestricted activities.



“Early Engagement” Strategies



Most CalWORKs Families Face Barriers to Employment.

Research indicates that the majority of CalWORKs recipients face circumstances that can hinder ongoing employment. These circumstances are known as “barriers to employment,” and can include low educational attainment, low English proficiency, lack of work experience, learning disabilities, poor mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and others.



Early Engagement Strategies Enacted to More Effectively Identify and Address Barriers to Employment.

The 2013-14 budget package included three new strategies to help identify barriers to employment and help CalWORKs recipients more effectively engage in welfare-to-work early in their participation in the program.

- ***Standardized Appraisal.*** The Department of Social Services is in the process of developing the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT), a standardized, online appraisal tool that will replace existing appraisals used by county welfare departments to screen new welfare-to-work participants for barriers to employment. The OCAT is intended to identify barriers that might otherwise have surfaced so that they can be addressed by appropriate welfare-to-work activity assignments. The OCAT is planned to be available statewide in July 2014.



“Early Engagement” Strategies *(Continued)*

- ***Family Stabilization.*** Family stabilization is a new component of CalWORKs in which families (both adults and children) that are facing certain immediate, destabilizing needs can receive intensive case management and specialized services. Immediate needs specifically identified in state law include homelessness, lack of safety due to domestic violence, and untreated or undertreated needs related to mental health or substance abuse. State law provides county welfare departments significant flexibility in determining what specialized services to provide under family stabilization. Counties are currently in the early stages of implementing family stabilization.
- ***Expanded Subsidized Employment.*** The 2013-14 budget package also included funding to expand the number of subsidized employment positions available through CalWORKs. Specifically, funding has been provided to phase in 8,250 new subsidized employment positions by June 2014.