



April 19, 2023

Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula  
California State Assembly  
1020 N Street, Room 124  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 310- Reimagine CalWORKs – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Arambula,

All Home writes to express our support for Assembly Bill 310, your bill to reimagine the CalWORKs (California Work, Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids) program by providing all parents with the critical support they need to ensure economic security for their children and themselves. AB 310 undoes historical harms of the CalWORKs program rooted in racist and sexist federal and state law.

**All Home is a Bay Area organization focused on addressing the cycle of homelessness and poverty and creating more housing stability and economic mobility for Californians with the lowest incomes.** In the Bay Area, over 1 million people live with extremely low incomes – an average of \$17,000 each year – and are one financial crisis away from experiencing homelessness. Many are eligible for CalWORKs assistance, which could remove barriers to housing and economic stability. But this program too often fails families and works counterproductively to reduce economic mobility for those who could benefit from it. Reform is both decades in the making and long overdue.

In 1996, Congress enacted the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program under the leadership of then House Speaker Newt Gingrich. In 1997, Governor Pete Wilson instituted the CalWORKs program, the state version of the federal program. With the passage and implementation of both pieces of legislation, there came a foundation for states, including California, to perpetuate racist, sexist, and classist ideas that have dominated safety net programs since their passage.<sup>1</sup>

Classist and sexist stereotypes of CalWORKs recipients perpetuate narratives that people living in poverty seek to take advantage of public assistance programs. However, CalWORKs participants face

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<sup>1</sup>For more on TANF's racist history, see Elisa Minoff, "[The Racist Roots of Work Requirements](#)," Center for the Study of Social Policy, February 2020; and Ali Safawi and LaDonna Pavetti, "[States Have Flexibility to Move TANF Work Programs in an Antiracist Direction](#)," CBPP, April 21, 2022; and Ife Floyd and LaDonna Pavetti, "[Improvements in TANF Cash Benefits Needed to Undo the Legacy of Historical Racism](#)," CBPP, January 26, 2022.

significant barriers to economic security and wellbeing such as gender, race, and immigration status-based discrimination in the labor market. This is partly due to welfare-to-work activities addressing barriers to employment that are not fully counted towards the federally-defined workforce participation rate (WPR), such as completion of a secondary school program and domestic violence services.<sup>2</sup> Racist tropes and stereotypes of Black workers in particular perpetuate narratives that Black people only face issues of unemployment. However, the larger employment crisis the majority of Black workers face is access to quality jobs with fair wages and safe working conditions.<sup>3</sup>

While California has made strides to remove barriers to the CalWORKs program, the program remains deeply flawed as a product of federal law and its own history of racist welfare legislation. Indeed, we must reimagine CalWORKs in order to fulfill prior efforts such as Cal-OAR and CalWORKs 2.0 and fully center the program on family's needs and well-being.

AB 310 undoes these historical harms through several critical reforms, including to:

- Eliminate or reduce sanctions to federal minimums - ensuring parents have the income to afford critical necessities like food, rent, utilities, and school supplies
- Shift CalWORKs' rigid work-first focus only on adults to a "family assistance" model enabling counties to quickly offer supports tailored to parents and children
- Move from a punitive, compliance approach to a process that respects and meets family's needs
- Expand work activities to include a wide variety of anti-poverty related activities necessary for families in crisis; and
- Eliminate the Work Participation Rate pass-through to remove the specter of financial penalty on counties and make clear that family well-being and long-term success are the program's guiding goals

AB 310 makes long-overdue changes necessary to undo the real stigma and suffering CalWORKs parents continue to report, and fundamentally move the program to reflect anti-racist values and drive family-centered outcomes. For these reasons, we are proud to support this important bill and thank you for your leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on CalWORKs WPR, see Sara Kimberlin, "[Harmful Obstacles: CalWORKs Work Participation Rate \(WPR\) Penalty](#)," California Budget & Policy Center, February 2023, and Esi Hutchful, "[Undercutting the Needs of California Families: The Harm of Racist, Sexist Work Requirements & Penalties in CalWORKs](#)," California Budget & Policy Center, March 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Fine, J., Burnham, L., Griffith, K., Ji, M., Narro, V., Pitts, S. (2018). The National Black Worker Center Project: Grappling with the Power-Building Imperative. Pitts, S. (Eds.), *No one size fits all: Worker organization, policy, and movement in a new economic age* (pp. 115-137). Labor and Employment Research Association.

Sincerely,

*Tomiquia Moss*

Tomiquia Moss

Founder and CEO

All Home