

POLICY OBJECTIVE #1

Repeal the Maximum Family Grant rule, which violates reproductive privacy rights of parents and pushes their families further into poverty.

Background

Current state law denies basic needs assistance to any child conceived while a member of the household is receiving CalWORKs cash aid. This policy, known as the Maximum Family Grant (MFG) rule, was enacted by a 1994 leveraged budget deal. Without the MFG rule, the amount most households would receive in additional benefits for a newborn child would be \$128 per month.

Exemptions to the MFG rule exist if the infant's parent was using one of three intrusive forms of birth control and a doctor attests that the baby's conception was due to the failure of that method. Additionally, if a woman becomes pregnant as a result of rape or incest, the MFG rule does not apply provided she reported the incident within 12 months.

The stated goal of the MFG policy is to reduce the births among welfare recipients, though decades of research have shown definitively that these types of "child exclusion" rules are not effective in reducing the incidence of births or the caseload in state TANF programs. Moreover, the rule asserts unacceptable restrictions on women's reproductive freedom, using economic coercion (access to a basic needs grant for their child) to limit contraceptive choice and require disclosure of private reproductive health information. In short, we should not condition financial assistance for a child on its mother's decision to use contraception or to disclose a sexual assault.

Recommended Action

- A. The Legislature should pass and the Governor should sign legislation repealing the MFG rule to protect the reproductive privacy of poor women and the health and well-being of their children.

POLICY OBJECTIVE #2

Increase CalWORKs benefits above the deep-poverty threshold and restore the federally allowed 60 months of lifetime eligibility to prevent irreparable harm of homelessness & basic needs neglect.

Background

During the past decade, over a billion dollars was cut from the CalWORKs program. These cuts coincided with significant program restructuring designed to expedite access to work skills and work opportunity, but these innovations have been slow to be launched and, instead, have resulted in increased sanctions of CalWORKs families (Source: CDSS). Though grants were increased in the Budget Acts of 2013 and 2014, they remain below half of the federal poverty level, a level experts report is developmentally dangerous for young children (Source: American Psychiatric Association), increases the likelihood of maternal depression (Source: Center for Law & Social Policy), and contributes to California's record high child homelessness rate.

Recommended Actions

- A. The Legislature and Administration should renew and strengthen commitments to establish early, client-focused engagement with appropriate support services and act swiftly to postpone the Welfare-to-Work 24-month cut-off for CalWORKs parents who did not receive these early services, were not connected to appropriate work opportunities, or reside in regions where unemployment remains high. Exemptions should be granted based on the needs of the family and there should be no cap to the number of exemptions a county may offer.

- B. The Administration and Legislature should act immediately to restore the federally allowed 60-month lifetime limit for adults in the CalWORKs program.
- C. The Administration and Legislature should act immediately to increase grants to a level sufficient to prevent harm to children and reduce childhood homelessness so that the Welfare-to-Work investments are better utilized to achieve long-term self-sufficiency.