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March 1, 2024

Honorable Caroline Menjivar, Chair
Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Sub. No. 3
1021 O Street, Suite 6720
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Corey Jackson, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
1021 O Street, Suite 6120
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: CalWORKs Program – Oppose Governor’s Proposed Budget Cuts

Dear Chair Menjivar and Chair Jackson,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to respectfully request that you oppose cuts to the CalWORKs program proposed in the Governor’s Budget, which total over \$400 million, including the permanent elimination of all funding for specific CalWORKs services. These cuts destabilize the CalWORKs program and unfairly and disproportionately place the burden of resolving a statewide budget deficit on very low-income families, jeopardizing counties’ ability to administer the CalWORKs program and serve our most vulnerable residents.

The Governor’s Budget proposes to eliminate the CalWORKs Family Stabilization (FS) Program and the CalWORKs Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE) Program beginning in the current fiscal year and annually ongoing. The FS program is vital to effectively serve families on CalWORKs today. It provides intensive case management and services to families experiencing crises or who have barriers hindering their ability to meaningfully participate in welfare-to-work activities. The range of services include domestic violence services, behavioral health, education supports, and housing supports. Uniquely, the FS program extends its services beyond adults to the children in the family and offers intentional service selection and family-centered case management. The FS Program also supports prevention of involvement of CalWORKs families in the child welfare system.

The CalWORKs ESE program offers CalWORKs participants subsidized employment placement, providing crucial training, skills, and experiences essential for securing and maintaining permanent employment. Many CalWORKs participants do not have any meaningful work experience or only have experience with low skilled work. Through the ESE Program, counties have cultivated relationships with local public, private, and non-profit employers committed to support CalWORKs participants in their professional development. The program has successfully transitioned CalWORKs participants from subsidized to unsubsidized employment, showcasing increased earnings and opportunities for clients leaving the program while aiding small businesses with wages.

In addition to the proposed program eliminations to FS and ESE, the Governor’s Budget proposes \$218 million in ongoing cuts to the Single Allocation, which is the funding we use to engage with families to determine their needs, provide supportive services and job-related supports, and

provide case management services, as well as for eligibility work for counties to process CalWORKs applications, redetermine eligibility, and maintain cases. The significant cuts proposed undermine the work that the counties have done over the past decade to move the CalWORKs program from a purely compliance-driven system to a family-centered approach that provides the foundation for helping families become self-sufficient. Counties have to perform state and federally mandated eligibility work within required timelines to ensure access to CalWORKs benefits, an administrative function that is already underfunded by \$100 million even prior to the cuts. Further reductions to eligibility funding in the Single Allocation will have to be backfilled by counties with funds intended for welfare-to-work and other services and supports. Combined with the cuts proposed to employment services funding within the Single Allocation, counties' ability to provide services and re-engagement with clients, in accordance with the CalWORKs 2.0 framework, and meet prescribed metrics will be compromised. The cuts to the Single Allocation will significantly impede the state's engagement on the Work Participation Rate federal pilot program, which allows states to focus their program on employment retention, family stability, and well-being, rather than the current federal work participation rate.

For years, the Administration, the Legislature, and counties have collectively worked to transition CalWORKs from a siloed, compliance driven program to one that not only meets the immediate financial needs of a family but also improves their collective lives and future outlook for self-sustained employment. Kern County looks forward to continued collaboration to ensure the well-being of California's most vulnerable families and we urge the Legislature to reject these devastating cuts.

For these reasons, the Kern County Board of Supervisors respectfully urges your support through the budget process for these critical resources and programs.

Sincerely,



David Couch, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc: Honorable Members and Staff, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
Honorable Members and Staff, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 1
Honorable Members, Kern County Legislative Delegation
County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA)
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
Kern Department of Human Services
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange