

# BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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May 28, 2025

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair  
Assembly Committee on Budget  
1021 O Street, Suite 8230  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Scott Wiener, Chair  
Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review  
1020 N Street, Room 502  
Sacramento, CA 95814

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

Honorable Dr. Akilah Weber Pierson, Chair  
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3  
1021 O Street, Suite 7310  
Sacramento, CA 95814

## **RE: California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs): Rightsize County Administrative Funding for the CalWORKs Program**

Dear Chairs Gabriel, Wiener, Jackson, and Weber Pierson,

The County of Kern respectfully requests your support for a long-overdue investment in the CalWORKs Single Allocation to ensure counties can continue to provide essential services to families experiencing poverty. Specifically, we request:

- A one-time investment of \$245 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26 to address immediate funding shortfalls, and
- An updated, sustainable administrative budget methodology starting FY 2026-27 that reflects the true cost of delivering services.

### **Why This Matters**

The CalWORKs program is one of the most powerful tools our state has to not only stabilize families, but to reduce poverty, and prevent generational harm. More than just a safety-net, the CalWORKs program helps parents build pathways to stability by offering employment and educational services, training, and support services. County human services agencies, like Kern DHS, are on the frontlines of this important work, serving *countless* families on behalf of the state.

### **Chronic Underfunding**

The CalWORKs Single Allocation, largely comprised of two major components: 1) the Eligibility component, which supports processing of CalWORKs applications, eligibility redetermination, and case maintenance including urgent benefits like homeless assistance; and 2) the Employment Services component which provides services and support to clients in Welfare-to-Work activities,

case management, and job-related support, is woefully underfunded, specifically in the eligibility component. This has forced counties to redirect funding from employment services to backfill eligibility activities each year for the last four years. In the most recent fiscal year, FY 2023-24, counties overspent eligibility funding by \$245 million, which resulted in the redirection of 20-percent of total employment services funding to cover for the overspending in eligibility. Early data suggests we are on track to overspend again in FY 2024-25.

The last update to the funding methodology was in FY 2018-2019, but since then the eligibility component has remained chronically underfunded. It does not reflect the actual costs associated with helping our CalWORKs applicants and recipients. In fact, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) findings confirmed a substantial funding shortfall (approximately \$239.5 million total funds in FY 2025-26) just to keep up with actual workload and staffing needs.

### **Real Impacts on Families**

Counties continue to do this intensive and complex work trying to meet federal and state mandates despite resource constraints, but inadequate funding puts timely delivery of basic needs at risk for families living in deep poverty. When counties are underfunded, families pay the price through delays in accessing benefits or reductions in employment support. In our county, we believe fully funding the administration component is paramount as Kern deals with chronically high unemployment and poverty rates in comparison to the rest of the state.

### **A Call for Support**

We recognize California's current fiscal challenges and remain committed to working collaboratively with the Administration and Legislature to find balanced, responsible solutions. Even incremental investments would make a meaningful difference in preventing further erosion of services.

By approving a one-time bridge investment and updating the eligibility funding methodology, the state can ensure counties have the tools needed to deliver timely, family-centered services that lift families out of poverty and set them on a path toward self-sufficiency and lasting stability.

For these reasons, Kern County urges your support for a long-overdue investment in the CalWORKs Single Allocation, enabling counties to continue delivering vital services to families experiencing poverty.

Sincerely,



Leticia Perez, Chair  
Kern County Board of Supervisors

cc:     Honorable Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3  
         Honorable Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2  
         Staff of Senate Committee on Budget & Fiscal Review  
         Staff of Assembly Committee on Budget  
         County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA)  
         California State Association of Counties (CSAC)  
         Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange