

Western Center on Law and Poverty supports the Conference Committee Budget Proposal and urges the Legislature and the Governor to support it. The proposed 2015-16 spending plan makes significant progress in reducing and alleviating poverty in California. We applaud the Conference Committee for including items that remove barriers to public benefits for children, prevent homelessness, feed the hungry, expand health care, reinstate cost of living adjustments for public benefit programs, help immigrants gain legal status, provide for the disabled, help Californians access justice, expand child care and reward work. This is a budget that is worthy of the state of California and those in need in our state. In particular, we support the following items in the budget.

Public Benefits

- **Repeal the CalWORKs Maximum Family Grant Rule** – The budget repeals the Maximum Family Grant rule that has denied public benefits *to children* solely because they were born into a family already on cash assistance. Repealing the law will reduce deep poverty for families and help all the children in the family thrive.
- **Reinstate the CalWORKs and SSI/SSP COLAs** – In 2009 the Legislature, under the urging of then Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, repealed the cost of living adjustments to public assistance grants for CalWORKs and the state portion of the SSI/SSP. Since those repeals, both grant amounts have lost ground to poverty. This budget restores the CalWORKs COLA on July 1, 2019 and restores the SSP COLA on January 1, 2020.
- **Suspend the 24-Month Welfare to Work Clock** – In 2012 the Governor insisted that the Legislature include a major change to CalWORKs welfare-to-work requirements. New estimates show the Governor’s reform will increase deep poverty for hundreds of poor families. This budget prevents that from happening.
- **Increase Monthly SSI/SSP Grants by \$10 for Individual Recipients** – Grant cuts and elimination of the SSP Cost of Living Adjustment dropped nearly 1 million SSI/SSP individual recipients below the poverty level. This budget takes the first step towards reversing those cuts.
- **Fund the State Emergency Food Assistance Program** – The budget provides \$3 million to Food Banks in California to help address the continuing impacts of the recession and California’s high poverty rate.

Health Care

- **Lay the Foundation for Health for All** – The budget provides \$40 million to provide Medi-Cal for low-income undocumented children and includes \$1 million to start developing a capped enrollment program for adults. This is an important initial investment to provide all Californians with equal opportunities to obtain health coverage and care.

- **Restore Adult Dental and Other Medi-Cal Benefits** – The budget restores adult dental and other Medi-Cal benefits that were cut in 2009. In a time of recovery and surplus, it is paramount that the state’s most vulnerable residents have access to full dental services which have been shown to prevent health deterioration and the need to utilize costlier emergency services as well as glasses, podiatry and other critical services.

Preventing Homelessness

- **Increase Funding for the CalWORKs Housing Support Program** – The budget includes a \$30 million augmentation to the highly effective rapid re-housing program adopted as part of last year’s budget. The increased funding will help thousands of CalWORKs families avoid homelessness and help parents begin their welfare-to-work programs more quickly.

Access to Justice

- **Fund Immigrant Legal Assistance** – The budget includes \$20 million in funding to provide education, outreach, and legal services for DACA, DAPA, and naturalization.
- **Provide Traffic Fine Amnesty** – More than 4 million Californians have a suspended license because they can’t afford to pay traffic tickets. The budget includes the Governor’s very important traffic amnesty program that will allow Californians to pay off their debt, get their driver’s license restored and get back to work.

Rewarding Work

- **Expand Access to Child Care** – The budget begins to address the shortage of affordable child care for low wage working families by adding 27,000 pre-school and child care slots and by providing long overdue rate increases for child care providers.
- **Create a State EITC** – The budget includes the Governor’s refundable state earned income tax credit (EITC). The credit will lift incomes for approximately 825,000 low-income California workers, many of whom have earnings below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level.

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