

**For immediate release**

April 1, 2015

## **California's lifetime ban on food assistance and public benefits for people convicted of a drug felony lifted on April 1, 2015**

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California's legislative leaders and Governor Brown had repealed the lifetime ban in June 2014, as part of the 2014-15 budget. It was officially enacted today, April 1, 2015. The repeal allows individuals with prior drug felonies, who have complied with the conditions of their probation or parole, to apply for and receive CalWORKs (basic needs support and job training), CalFresh food assistance or General Relief.

Jessica Bartholow, who led the repeal effort for Western Center on Law & Poverty, commented, "We were motivated by the stories of people like Rosie, who was abused as a child, turned out onto the streets by her family, jailed for drug use and finally turned her life around. Because California employed a lifetime ban for people with prior drug-related felony convictions, she was denied basic needs assistance, job training, and child care as she tried to straighten out her life. Now, she can."

This repeal followed over a decade of organizing, culminating in a broad coalition of over 140 community-based organizations, including organizations such as Starting Over and California Partnership.

The lifetime ban repeal had been championed in recent years by Senators Mark Leno and Senator Loni Hancock who were joined last year by important Assembly allies, Budget Chairperson Nancy Skinner and Assembly Justice Reinvestment Select Committee Co-chairs, Assembly Members Ammiano and Jones Sawyer and received editorial support from the LA Times, NY Times and other publications.

Western Center on Law & Poverty fights in the courts, counties and capital to secure housing, healthcare and a secure safety net for low-income Californians. Western Center brings about system-wide change through pivotal impact litigation; hard hitting advocacy; negotiations with state and local government; and support for local legal aid programs. Western Center's work reaches every county in the state.

