



February 14, 2018

Honorable Kevin de León & Honorable Toni Atkins  
 President pro Tempore & President pro Tempore Elect, California State Senate

Honorable Anthony Rendon  
 Speaker, California State Assembly

Honorable Holly J. Mitchell  
 Chair, California State Senate Committee on Budget

Honorable Phil Ting  
 Chair, California State Assembly Committee on Budget

**RE: End Childhood Deep Poverty for CalWORKs Families in the 2018-19 Budget**

Dear Legislative and Budget Committee Leaders,

We are writing to request your support for an important community priority to end childhood deep poverty in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program.

CalWORKs grants are simply too low to support the healthy growth and development of our state's poorest children. The current average CalWORKs grant of \$556 for a family of three is 33percent of

the federal poverty level (FPL). When children live in deep poverty (defined as below 50 percent of the FPL), they endure hardships that impair their ability to thrive<sup>1</sup> and impact their capacity to learn, develop and thrive as children and throughout their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

Childhood deep poverty has a short-term impact on educational success and classroom environments at schools with a high-density of very poor children. Over the long term, it also reduces the strength and capacity of our future workforce. Thus, deep poverty increases the likelihood that childhood impairments will result in adult dependency on safety net services.<sup>3</sup>

Deep poverty is so dangerous for children because they live in households where basic needs go chronically unmet. Children living in these conditions not only experience the depravity of not having their needs met, but are also deeply impacted by the toxic stress that results from chronically unmet needs.<sup>4</sup> One study found that growing up in deep poverty more negatively impacts a child's life chances than neonatal exposure to cocaine.<sup>5</sup>

Growing up with unmet basic needs not only impacts the physical health of a child, but also their mental health and future potential. This is, in part, because parents who are unable to adequately care for their children are more likely to experience maternal and/or parental depression,<sup>6</sup> a condition associated with reduced maternal-child interaction known to undermine school readiness among poor children.<sup>7</sup> Deep poverty also harms children's brain development and early functioning, disrupting their ability to succeed in school and in life.<sup>8</sup> These challenges have been documented to reduce the ability of children to cope during difficult situations, the very skill they will need most as a child living in poverty or a young adult trying to exit it.

Ultimately, deep poverty damages a child's chance to escape poverty and fuels an intergenerational cycle of poverty. Children who are born in deep poverty are three times as likely to be deeply poor at age 40 than children not born in deep poverty.<sup>9</sup>

Our state has a moral and practical obligation to provide a stronger foundation for the children in the CalWORKs program and to help their families move toward greater safety, achievement, and success. Simply giving families more money, and ensuring grant levels help families rise above the harmful impact of deep poverty will produce positive results for the most impoverished in our state. We know that even if we end deep poverty among CalWORKs families, many of our recipients will still live in poverty and be unable to afford basic necessities at times; however, the impact of toxic

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<sup>1</sup> "Family Poverty, Welfare Reform, and Child Development." Greg J. Duncan and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn Source: Child Development, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 2000), pp. 188-196. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1132232>

<sup>2</sup> Duncan, G and Magnuson, K. 2011. The Long Reach of Childhood Poverty. [http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/\\_media/pdf/pathways/winter\\_2011/PathwaysWinter11\\_Duncan.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/_media/pdf/pathways/winter_2011/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Barton, Paul E, and Richard J Coley. *The Family: America's Smallest School*. Policy Information Report, Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2007, and Berliner, David C. *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success*. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Evans, G. W. and English, K. 2002. The Environment of Poverty: Multiple Stressor Exposure, Psychophysiological Stress, and Socioemotional Adjustment. *Child Development*, 73: 1238-1248. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00469

<sup>5</sup> [http://articles.philly.com/2013-07-22/news/40709969\\_1\\_hallam-hurt-so-called-crack-babies-funded-study](http://articles.philly.com/2013-07-22/news/40709969_1_hallam-hurt-so-called-crack-babies-funded-study)

<sup>6</sup> <http://news.yale.edu/2013/07/29/no-money-diapers-depressing-reality-poor-mothers>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412199-infants-of-depressed.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development.

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/toxic-stress-derails-healthy-development/>

<sup>9</sup> Cuddy, E., Venator, J. and Reeves, R. 2015. In a land of dollars: Deep poverty and its consequences. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-a-land-of-dollars-deep-poverty-and-its-consequences/>

stress on the health and well-being of impoverished children will be markedly reduced when we ensure they have a basic level of subsistence that they will not drop below.

We are grateful to Senator Mitchell for agreeing to introduce Senate Bill 982, which calls for an end to childhood deep poverty in the CalWORKs program and urge all of you, as leaders of the California State Legislature and Budget Committees, to protect the future opportunities of our state's poorest children by passing a budget that adequately funds CalWORKs grants at a level that ensures no child in a CalWORKs family lives in deep poverty.

Signed,

Alameda County Community Food Bank  
Black Women for Wellness  
California Welfare Directors Association  
California Hunger Action Coalition  
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice  
California Church Impact  
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN)  
Californians for Disability Rights Inc  
California Partnership  
Children's Defense Fund - California  
Coalition of CA Welfare Rights Organizations  
Friends Committee on Legislation of California  
Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA)  
Lutheran Office of Public Policy - California  
National Association of Social Workers – California Chapter  
National Council of Jewish Women-California  
Parent Voices California  
PolicyLink  
ST. Anthony's Foundation  
Western Center on Law and Poverty

CC: Honorable Dr. Richard Pan, California State Senate, Chair of Budget Subcommittee 3  
Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula, California State Assembly, Chair of Budget  
Subcommittee 1  
Members of the California Senate Budget Committee  
Members of the California Assembly Budget Committee  
Mr. Will Lightbourne, Director of the California Department of Social Services  
Ms. Donna Campbell, Secretary, Office of Governor Jerry Brown