



March 26, 2018

Honorable Scott Wiener
 Chair, California State Senate Human Services Committee
 1020 N Street, Room 521
 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 982 (Mitchell) End Childhood Deep Poverty for CalWORKs Families

Dear Chairperson Wiener,

Our organizations are leaders in the fight against poverty in California. We are writing to request your support for Senate Bill 982 (Mitchell) which would largely end childhood deep poverty in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program.

Childhood Deep Poverty is Bad for Children and Bad for Our Economy

CalWORKs grants are simply too low to support the healthy growth and development of our state's poorest children.¹ The current average CalWORKs grant of \$566 for a family of (3) three is 33 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), and grants have lost over one-third of their purchasing power since 1998-99.² When children live in deep poverty (defined as below 50 percent of the FPL), they endure hardships that impair their ability to thrive³ and impact their capacity to learn, develop and thrive as children and throughout their lifetime.⁴ 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,

¹ CalWORKs Grants are Overdue for a Significant Investment

<http://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/calworks-grants-overdue-significant-investment/>

² Schumacher, Kristin. 2018. California Budget and Policy Center.

³ "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>

⁴ 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

threatening our collective economic prosperity.⁵ Deep poverty also increases the likelihood that childhood impairments will result in adult dependency on safety net services.⁶

Deep Poverty Increases Likelihood of Homelessness

Deep poverty is so dangerous for children because they are more likely to experience homelessness⁷ or to have other basic needs 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.⁸ One study found that growing up in deep poverty more negatively impacts a child's life chances than neonatal exposure to cocaine.⁹

Deep Poverty Negatively Impacts School Readiness & Coping Skills

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 financially unable to care for their children are more likely to experience maternal and/or parental depression,¹⁰ a condition associated with reduced maternal-child interaction known to undermine school readiness among poor children.¹¹ Deep poverty also harms children's brain development and early functioning, disrupting their ability to succeed in school and in life.¹² 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.

Deep Poverty Undermines Efforts to Escape Poverty

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.¹³

CalWORKs Grant Increases are Needed to End Deep Poverty

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

⁵ The Long Reach of Poverty

http://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf

Consequences of Deep Poverty

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-a-land-of-dollars-deep-poverty-and-its-consequences/>

Long-Term Consequences of Growing Up Poor

http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_909.html

⁶ 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.

⁷ CW grants relative to housing costs:

<http://calbudgetcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CalWORKs-Grants-Fall-Short-as-Rents-Continue-to-Rise.pdf> and

<http://calbudgetcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CalWORKs-Grants-Fall-Short-of-Covering-Housing-Costs-02252016.pdf>

and <http://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/the-calworks-grant-is-lower-than-cash-assistance-for-families-in-22-states-when-compared-to-housing-costs/>

⁸ 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

⁹ http://articles.philly.com/2013-07-22/news/40709969_1_hallam-hurt-so-called-crack-babies-funded-study

¹⁰ <http://news.yale.edu/2013/07/29/no-money-diapers-depressing-reality-poor-mothers>

¹¹ <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412199-infants-of-depressed.pdf>

¹² Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development.

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

¹³ 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/>

success.¹⁴ Increasing grant levels will help CalWORKs families rise above the impact of deep poverty, though many will continue to struggle with the burden of extraordinarily high housing costs.¹⁵ We know from the evidence that the health and well-being of impoverished children will be markedly improved when we ensure they have a basic level of subsistence that they will not drop below.

We Urge Your Support for SB 982

Senate Bill 982 calls for an end to childhood deep poverty in the CalWORKs program. It will protect the future opportunities of our state's poorest children by ensuring no child in a CalWORKs family lives in deep poverty. For these reasons, our organizations are very proud to sponsor and support this bill and urge your 'Aye' vote.

Signed,

Black Women for Wellness
California Partnership
California Interfaith Coalition
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice
Children's Defense Fund-California
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights
County Welfare Directors Association of California
Coalition of CA Welfare Rights Organizations
Friends Committee on Legislation of California
Latinas for Reproductive Justice
National Association of Social Workers
National Council of Jewish Women-California
Parent Voices California
Western Center on Law and Poverty

CC: Office of Honorable Holly J. Mitchell, Author
Members of the California Senate Human Services Committee

¹⁴ Brain Studies Highlight Importance of Anti-Poverty Policies for Children

<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/brain-studies-highlight-importance-of-anti-poverty-policies-for-children>

¹⁵ Summary of the research on topic of cash welfare benefits impact on outcomes.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2018/03/welfare-childhood/555119/>