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March 28, 2024

The Honorable Caroline Menjivar
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

Honorable Members
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3

The Honorable Dr. Corey Jackson
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2

Honorable Members
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2

RE: OPPOSE – Governor’s budget proposed cuts, California work opportunity and responsibility to kids (CalWORKs) Program

Dear Senator Menjivar and Assemblymember Jackson:

On behalf of the Solano County Board of Supervisors, in coordination with our Solano County Department of Health and Social Services, I am writing to strongly oppose the cuts to the CalWORKs program proposed in the Governor’s Budget, which total over \$400 million. In addition to the prospective cuts that would begin in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25, the Governor’s Budget proposes to retroactively cut current-year funding and permanently eliminate all funding for specific CalWORKs services. These cuts unfairly and disproportionately place the burden of resolving a statewide budget deficit on very low-income families, jeopardizing counties’ ability to administer the CalWORKs program, and undermining the significant work done to align the program with the state’s core values.

The Governor’s Budget proposes to eliminate the CalWORKs Family Stabilization (FS) Program and the CalWORKs Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE) Program beginning in the current fiscal year and annually ongoing. The FS program is vital to effectively serve families on CalWORKs today. It provides intensive case management and services to families experiencing crises or who have barriers hindering their ability to meaningfully participate in welfare-to-work activities; the range of services include domestic violence services, behavioral health, education supports, and housing supports. Uniquely, the FS program extends its services beyond adults to the children in the family and offers intentional service selection and family-centered case management. The FS Program also supports prevention of involvement of CalWORKs families in the child welfare system.

The CalWORKs ESE program offers CalWORKs participants subsidized employment placement, providing crucial training, skills, and experiences essential for securing and maintaining permanent employment. Many CalWORKs participants do not have any meaningful work experience or only have experience with low skilled work. Through the ESE Program, counties have cultivated relationships with local public, private, and non-profit employers committed to support CalWORKs participants in their professional development. The program has successfully transitioned CalWORKs participants

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from subsidized to unsubsidized employment, showcasing increased earnings and opportunities for clients leaving the program while aiding small businesses with wages.

In our county, the FS Program has assisted families experiencing domestic violence, short-term destabilizing financial events, substance abuse, legal issues, and a variety of challenges that create barriers to stability and self-sufficiency. The program has prevented families from being evicted or having utilities shut off and has paid fines that were preventing individuals from obtaining a driver's license required for employment. The program has also helped repair vehicles and provide insurance for parents who would otherwise lack reliable transportation to work. A mother of five was the victim of domestic violence and had no resources to support her family, so she applied for CalWORKs. The FS Program paid back rent and provided domestic violence counseling services. When she was ready to seek employment but lacked experience, she was referred to an ESE Program partner to gain work experience, and they subsequently hired her. Social Workers provide intensive case management and a host of direct services to families facing significant barriers to stability and employment thanks to the FS Program, and these services would be cut if funding for the program is eliminated.

In Solano County, the ESE Program has offered CalWORKs clients the opportunity to build or increase their job skills, expand their employment network, and ultimately obtain living wage unsubsidized employment. New or improved job skills increase earning potential which leads to more stable families and self-sufficiency, including maintaining housing which is often the first financial obligation that is unmet when the family income is reduced or stopped. Our local employers have a pivotal role in hiring our ESE clients who gain work experience and contribute to the local economy. Solano County has recently executed contracts with three new ESE providers to offer more opportunities for employment in a variety of workplace settings.

In addition to the proposed program eliminations to FS and ESE, the Governor's Budget proposes \$218 million in ongoing cuts to the Single Allocation, which is the funding we use to engage with families to determine their needs, provide supportive services and job-related supports, and provide case management services, as well as for eligibility work for counties to process CalWORKs applications, redetermine eligibility, and maintain cases. The significant cuts proposed undermine the work that the counties have done over the past decade to move the CalWORKs program from a purely compliance-driven system to a family-centered approach that emphasizes support and stabilization of the family to provide the foundation for efforts to help families become self-sufficient. Counties must perform state and federally mandated eligibility work within required timelines to ensure access to CalWORKs benefits, an administrative function that is already underfunded by \$100 million even prior to the cuts.

Further reductions to eligibility funding in the Single Allocation will have to be backfilled by counties with funds intended for welfare-to-work and other services and supports. Combined with the cuts proposed to employment services funding within the Single Allocation, counties' ability to provide services and re-engagement with clients, in accordance with the CalWORKs 2.0 framework, and meet Cal-OAR metrics will be compromised. The cuts to the Single Allocation will impede the state's participation in the WPR alternative federal pilot program, should the state be chosen; the pilot program allows chosen states to focus their program on employment retention, family stability, and well-being, rather than the current federal work participation rate.

In our county, these cuts to the Single Allocation would require us to reduce eligibility and intensive case management staff, which will impact service timelines and family engagement for more than 3,200 Solano County families. In addition, reductions will be necessary to direct service offerings not available in any other local program, including our employment retention program which provides

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financial and case management support in the months following a family's discontinuance due to employment earnings.

For years, the Administration, the Legislature, and counties have collectively worked to shift the CalWORKs program from compliance driven and siloed to one that not only meet the immediate financial needs of a family but that also improves the lives of families. Our county looks forward to continued collaboration to ensure the well-being of California's most vulnerable families and urge the Legislature to reject these significant cuts.

For these reasons, the Solano County Board of Supervisors, in coordination with our County Department of Health and Social Services, urges your support to oppose the Governor's proposed budget cuts.

Sincerely,



Mitch Mashburn, Chair
Solano County Board of Supervisors

CC:

The Honorable Bill Dodd, California State Senator
The Honorable Lori Wilson, California State Assemblymember
Honorable Solano County Board of Supervisors
Members and Staff of the Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 3
Members and Staff of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee No.1
Missy Talbot, County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA)
Jerry Huber, Director, Solano County Health and Social Services
Bela Matyas, M.D., M.P.H., Health Officer, Solano County
Kelley Curtis, Deputy Director, H&SS Employment and Eligibility, Solano County
Paragon Government Relations
Karen Lange, SYASL Partners, Inc.