

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MAY 23, 2025

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 21, 2025

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2025–26 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 969

Introduced by Assembly Member Celeste Rodriguez

February 20, 2025

An act to amend Sections 11495, 11495.1, and 11495.17 of, and to repeal and add Sections 11495.15 and 11495.16 of, the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to CalWORKs.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 969, as amended, Celeste Rodriguez. CalWORKs: family violence option and gender-based violence information.

Existing law provides for the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, under which each county provides cash assistance and other benefits to qualified low-income families and individuals. Existing law imposes various requirements on CalWORKs recipients, including the requirement to participate in specified welfare-to-work activities, unless a good cause exception applies. Existing law requires a county to waive a program requirement for a recipient who has been identified as a past or present victim of domestic abuse when it has been determined that good cause under the welfare-to-work requirement exists.

This bill would, among other things, instead require a county to waive a program requirement for an applicant or recipient who has been identified as a past or present victim of domestic abuse for good cause, as specified, unless the county has evidence that the requirement would not make it more difficult for the applicant or recipient or their children

to escape or to stay safe after escaping abuse, or that it would not be detrimental or unfairly penalize them. The bill would require counties, within specified timeframes, to notify each applicant or recipient about whether or not a waiver will be issued, and if a waiver is denied, the specific reasons for the denials. The bill would require the State Department of Social Services, in consultation with stakeholders, to develop a uniform set of written materials that addresses all relevant information and necessary requirements designed to assist individuals to identify, escape, or stop future abuse, overcome the effects of abuse, and make informed decisions, and a standardized waiver request form. The bill would require each county to provide the written materials and standardized waiver request form to each applicant and recipient, as specified. The bill would require the department to implement these provisions through an all-county letter or similar instruction. By imposing duties on counties, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to the statutory provisions noted above.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: yes.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 11495 of the Welfare and Institutions
2 Code is amended to read:
3 11495. (a) It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this
4 article to maximize protections afforded to survivors of domestic
5 violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and stalking through
6 the provisions of this article. By adopting this provision, the
7 Legislature recognizes that some individuals who may need public
8 assistance have been or are victims of abuse, and intends to ensure
9 that applicants and recipients who are past or present victims of
10 abuse are not placed at further risk or unfairly penalized by
11 CalWORKs requirements and procedures. The Legislature intends
12 that, in implementing this article, program requirements not be

1 created or applied in such a way as to encourage a victim to remain
2 with the person committing the abuse.

3 (b) For purposes of this article, “abuse” includes sexual
4 harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking.

5 SEC. 2. Section 11495.1 of the Welfare and Institutions Code
6 is amended to read:

7 11495.1. (a) The department shall maximize protections
8 afforded to survivors of domestic violence, sexual harassment,
9 sexual assault, and stalking through the provisions of this article.

10 (b) The department shall develop protocols on handling cases
11 in which applicants and recipients are past or present victims of
12 abuse. The protocols shall define domestic abuse, and shall address
13 training standards and curricula, individual case assessments,
14 confidentiality procedures, notice procedures and counseling or
15 other appropriate participation requirements as part of an overall
16 plan to transition from welfare-to-work. The protocol shall specify
17 how counties shall do the following:

18 (1) Identify applicants and recipients of assistance under this
19 chapter who have been or are victims of abuse, including those
20 who self-identify, while protecting confidentiality.

21 (2) Refer these individuals to supportive services.

22 (3) (A) Waive, on a case-by-case basis, any program
23 requirements that would make it more difficult for applicants and
24 recipients who are past or present victims of domestic abuse or
25 their children to escape abuse or to stay safe after escaping abuse,
26 and that would be detrimental or unfairly penalize them.
27 Requirements that shall be waived, if eligible, include, but are not
28 limited to, time limits on receipt of assistance, work requirements,
29 educational requirements, paternity establishment and child support
30 cooperation requirements.

31 (B) Issue an adequate written notice of action to each applicant
32 or recipient of the determination about whether or not a waiver
33 will be issued, and if a waiver is denied, the specific reasons for
34 the denial.

35 (c) The department shall issue regulations describing the
36 protocol identified in subdivision (b) no later than January 1, 2028.

37 SEC. 3. Section 11495.15 of the Welfare and Institutions Code
38 is repealed.

39 SEC. 4. Section 11495.15 is added to the Welfare and
40 Institutions Code, to read:

1 11495.15. (a) (1) A county shall waive a program requirement
2 for an applicant or recipient who has been identified as a past or
3 present victim of domestic abuse for good cause, unless the county
4 has evidence, substantiated by documentation, that the requirement
5 would not make it more difficult for the applicant or recipient, or
6 their children, to escape abuse or to stay safe after escaping abuse,
7 or that it would not be detrimental or unfairly penalize them.

8 (2) A county shall find good cause for a waiver when
9 compliance with the program requirement would make it more
10 difficult for an applicant or recipient, or their children, to escape
11 abuse or to stay safe after escaping abuse, or that it would not be
12 detrimental or unfairly penalize them.

13 (b) When reviewing waiver eligibility, a county shall not
14 consider participation hours in domestic violence, mental health,
15 or substance disorder services that contribute to the individual
16 meeting any required participation hours as a basis for denying a
17 waiver. In no event shall a county deny a waiver because a survivor
18 does not receive or participate in services from a victim service
19 provider.

20 (c) A county shall reevaluate a waiver, as needed, but shall not
21 reevaluate the waiver more frequently than every six months. A
22 county may reevaluate a waiver for welfare-to-work requirements
23 at shorter intervals only if the evaluation is to include an additional
24 waiver of welfare-to-work requirements.

25 (d) A county shall notify each applicant or recipient about
26 whether or not a waiver will be issued, and if a waiver is denied,
27 the specific reasons for the denial. The county shall provide an
28 adequate written notice of action regarding the waiver request by
29 the time of application approval, or, for recipients, within 10 days
30 of the request.

31 (e) A county shall notify each recipient about whether or not a
32 waiver will be terminated and the reasons for the termination. The
33 county shall provide a written adequate notice of action of the
34 termination.

35 SEC. 5. Section 11495.16 of the Welfare and Institutions Code
36 is repealed.

37 SEC. 6. Section 11495.16 is added to the Welfare and
38 Institutions Code, to read:

39 11495.16. (a) On or before ~~July 1, 2026~~, *January 1, 2027*, the
40 department, in consultation with stakeholders, including, but not

1 limited to, federally recognized state domestic violence and sexual
2 assault coalitions, other domestic abuse, sexual assault, and sexual
3 harassment advocates, and public benefits advocates, shall develop
4 both of the following:

5 (1) A uniform set of written materials to be used statewide that
6 addresses all relevant information and necessary requirements
7 designed to assist individuals to identify, escape, or stop future
8 abuse, overcome the effects of abuse, and make informed decisions.
9 The statewide information may be provided in one document and
10 shall include all of the following information:

11 (A) Available domestic abuse, stalking, sexual assault, and
12 sexual harassment resources and victim service providers.

13 (B) How the information of an applicant or recipient abuse
14 survivor is kept confidential and when the county human services
15 agency is legally required to disclose that information.

16 (C) Information on the availability of program waivers,
17 including a specific list of program requirements that may be
18 waived, other program requirements not listed that may be waived,
19 how to request a waiver, and a waiver request form, as described
20 in paragraph (2).

21 (D) Information about safety planning, including the process
22 of identifying risks, mapping out resources, and assessing options
23 to increase survivor safety developed by specialized workers in
24 partnership with the abuse survivor.

25 (E) How the county will tailor a recipient survivor's
26 welfare-to-work plan and CalWORKs support services to meet
27 their needs.

28 (F) Information on CalWORKs eligibility for noncitizen abuse
29 survivors, exceptions to alien sponsor deeming requirements, and
30 information on applying for legal status for noncitizen abuse
31 survivors.

32 (2) A standardized waiver request form that allows an applicant
33 or recipient to identify the specific program requirements that they
34 need waived. The form shall include a list of program requirements
35 that may be waived, the ability to request a waiver of a requirement
36 that may not be specifically listed, and a way for an applicant or
37 recipient to indicate whether they are seeking a waiver for a
38 retroactive period of time.

39 (b) A county shall safely and confidentially verbally inform of,
40 and provide, in the preferred language identified by the applicant

1 or recipient to the extent required by law, the written materials and
2 standardized waiver request form described in subdivision (a) to
3 each applicant and recipient. Each county shall supplement the
4 written materials described in subdivision (a) with the name and
5 contact information for local service providers, local policies, and
6 local resources.

7 (c) The department shall automate CalSAWS and provide the
8 written materials and standardized waiver request form described
9 in subdivision (a) on BenefitsCal to ensure that technology is fully
10 utilized to ensure that applicants and recipients who are abuse
11 survivors have access to that information and receive the assistance
12 they need.

13 SEC. 7. Section 11495.17 of the Welfare and Institutions Code
14 is amended to read:

15 11495.17. During the annual budget process, the department
16 shall update the Legislature at hearings regarding the number of
17 CalWORKs recipients, aggregated by county, who have been
18 identified as potential victims of domestic abuse during the online
19 CalWORKs appraisal process, and the number of CalWORKs
20 recipients who have been identified as survivors of nondomestic
21 stalking, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment. The report shall
22 also include a list of counties that require domestic violence
23 survivors to be offered waivers pursuant to Section 11495.15 and
24 a summary of actions taken by the department to address the
25 specific and unique needs of survivors of domestic abuse.

26 SEC. 8. Notwithstanding the rulemaking provisions of the
27 Administrative Procedure Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with
28 Section 11340) of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government
29 Code), the State Department of Social Services shall implement
30 this act through an all-county letter or similar instruction no later
31 than July 1, 2026.

32 SEC. 9. If the Commission on State Mandates determines that
33 this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to
34 local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made
35 pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division
36 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.