

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 21, 2025

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2025–26 REGULAR SESSION

## ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 969

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**Introduced by Assembly Member Celeste Rodriguez**

February 20, 2025

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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 *a 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 ~~align the CalWORKs family violence option and~~  
5     ~~gender-based violence provisions with, and not be more restrictive~~  
6     ~~than, the federal requirements and option concerning survivors of~~  
7     ~~abuse provided for in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families~~  
8     ~~program pursuant to Sections 402(a)(7) and 402(a)(8) of the federal~~  
9     ~~Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 602(a)(7),(8)) and any relevant~~  
10    ~~federal guidelines. maximize protections afforded to survivors of~~  
11    ~~domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and stalking~~  
12    ~~through the provisions of this article.~~ By adopting this provision,  
13    the Legislature recognizes that some individuals who may need  
14    public assistance have been or are victims of abuse, and intends

1 to ensure that applicants and recipients who are past or present  
2 victims of abuse are not placed at further risk or unfairly penalized  
3 by CalWORKs requirements and procedures. The Legislature  
4 intends that, in implementing this article, program requirements  
5 not be created or applied in such a way as to encourage a victim  
6 to remain with the person committing the abuse.

7 (b) For purposes of this article, “abuse” ~~and “gender-based~~  
8 ~~violence”~~ includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic  
9 violence, and stalking.

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

12 11495.1. (a) The department shall *maximize protections*  
13 *afforded to survivors of domestic violence, sexual harassment,*  
14 *sexual assault, and stalking through the provisions of this article.*

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

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

26 (2) Refer these individuals to supportive services.

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

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

40 (b)

1 (c) The department shall issue regulations describing the  
2 protocol identified in subdivision-(a) (b) no later than January 1,  
3 2027. 2028.

4 SEC. 3. Section 11495.15 of the Welfare and Institutions Code  
5 is repealed.

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

8 11495.15. (a) (1) A county shall waive a program requirement  
9 for-a *an applicant or* recipient who has been identified as a past  
10 or present victim of domestic abuse *for good cause*, unless the  
11 county has ~~evidence~~ *evidence, substantiated by documentation*,  
12 that the requirement would not make it more difficult for the  
13 ~~recipient or their children to escape~~ *applicant or recipient, or their*  
14 *children, to escape abuse or to stay safe after escaping* abuse, or  
15 that it would not be detrimental or unfairly penalize them.

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

21 (b) When reviewing waiver eligibility, a county shall not  
22 consider participation hours in domestic violence, mental health,  
23 or substance disorder services that contribute to the individual  
24 meeting any required participation hours as a basis for denying a  
25 waiver. In no event shall a county deny a waiver because a survivor  
26 does not receive or participate in services from a victim service  
27 provider.

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

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

39 (e) A county shall notify each recipient about whether or not a  
40 waiver will be terminated and the reasons for the termination. The

1 county shall provide a written adequate notice of action *of* the  
2 termination.

3 SEC. 5. Section 11495.16 of the Welfare and Institutions Code  
4 is repealed.

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

7 11495.16. (a) On or before—~~January~~ *July* 1, 2026, the  
8 department, in consultation with stakeholders, including, but not  
9 limited to, federally recognized state domestic violence and sexual  
10 assault coalitions, other domestic abuse, sexual assault, and sexual  
11 harassment advocates, and public benefits advocates, shall develop  
12 both of the following:

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

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

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

24 (C) Information on the availability of program waivers,  
25 including a specific list of program requirements that may be  
26 waived, other program requirements not listed that may be waived,  
27 how to request a waiver, and a waiver request form, as described  
28 in paragraph (2).

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

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

36 (F) Information on CalWORKs eligibility for noncitizen abuse  
37 survivors, exceptions to alien sponsor deeming requirements, and  
38 information on applying for legal status for noncitizen abuse  
39 survivors.

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

(b) A county shall safely and confidentially verbally inform of, and provide, in the preferred language identified by the applicant or recipient to the extent required by law, the written materials and standardized waiver request form described in subdivision (a) to each applicant and recipient. Each county shall supplement the written materials described in subdivision (a) with the name and contact information for local service providers, local policies, and local resources.

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

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

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

SEC. 8. Notwithstanding the rulemaking provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 11340) of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code), the State Department of Social Services shall implement

1 this act through an all-county letter or similar instruction no later  
2 than ~~January~~ *July* 1, 2026.

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

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