

# Assembly Bill 2300

## CalWORKs and CalFresh Employment Requirement Exemptions

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

### SUMMARY

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AB 2300 protects CalWORKs and CalFresh recipients' ability to exercise their workers' rights by expanding good cause welfare-to-work exemptions and childcare-related welfare-to-work exemptions. Furthermore, this bill requires county human service agencies to provide recipients with information on workplace rights and remedies when they voluntarily leave a job.

### BACKGROUND

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CalWORKs and CalFresh are public assistance programs that provide financial aid, food assistance, and other services to low-income families. According to a 2020 PPIC report, about half of Californian children received CalFresh and/or CalWORKs assistance by the time they turn five. The two programs also served approximately 58% of Latino children and 95% of African American children from birth through age five.

In order to remain eligible for benefits, recipients must work a specified number of hours a week. These hours are determined by a number of factors, including the number of children and present parents in the household. If recipients fail to meet these requirements, they are subject to sanctions that strip them of some or all of their benefits unless they are exempted by their county human services agency. Unfortunately, these sanctions are often applied to those that voluntarily leave a job or reduce their work hours in response to workplace abuse. This occurs even as many of these workers qualify for good-cause exemptions, which are employment exemptions that are applied in response to abusive or adverse work environments. As a result, many recipients feel pressured to remain at jobs that schedule them for unpredictable hours or violate their workplace rights.

This problem is exacerbated by a general lack of knowledge about workplace rights. Currently, county human service agencies are not required to inform recipients of their workplace rights when they voluntarily leave a job. This has prevented many recipients from seeking reprieve, as they remain unaware of what qualifies for a good-cause exemption and how to file a complaint with the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing.

Furthermore, existing law limits CalWORKs recipients to only one 12-week employment exemption when they give birth to or adopt a child under the age of 6 months. This exemption can be extended to 12 months by their county human services agency, but the agency is not required to do this. If recipients give birth to or adopt any subsequent children, they are only eligible for a 12 week exemption that may be extended up to 6 months. The brevity of these exemptions is concerning, as they almost certainly limit the potential of crucial early parent-child bonding.

### SOLUTION

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AB 2300 exempts CalWORKs and CalFresh recipients from employment requirements for three months if they self-certify that they left a job due to unpredictable scheduled hours or violations of any workplace rights granted to them by local, state, and federal labor laws. This bill also requires county human service agencies to inform recipients of their workplace rights if they voluntarily leave a job.

Furthermore, AB 2300 removes the one-time limit on employment exemptions for primary caregivers of young children. It also expands the exemptions to cover the first 24 months after the birth or adoption of a child aged 12 months or younger. Finally, the bill offers an 8 week exemption for recipients that suffer a miscarriage. The exemption can be extended to 12 months if the recipients' medical records indicate that a longer exemption is necessary.

### SPONSORS

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Legal Aid at Work  
The CalWORKs Association's Project SPARC  
Western Center on Law & Poverty  
Women's Foundation of California  
Worksafe

### CONTACT

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