

Assembly Bill 2300

CalWORKs and CalFresh Employment Requirement Exemptions

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

SUMMARY

AB 2300 protects CalWORKs and CalFresh recipients' ability to exercise their workers' rights by expanding good cause 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

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.

SOLUTION

AB 2300 exempts CalWORKs and CalFresh recipients from employment requirements for three months if they state 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.

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