

October 25, 2024

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 24-74

The purpose of this All County Letter is to provide guidance to counties regarding changes to the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Cal-Learn program and good cause for pregnant and parenting students in the Welfare-to-Work program as a result of Senate Bill 521 (Chapter 615, Statutes of 2023).



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GOVERNOR

October 25, 2024

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 24-74

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CALWORKS PROGRAM SPECIALISTS
ALL COUNTY WELFARE-TO-WORK COORDINATORS
ALL COUNTY CONSORTIA PROJECT MANAGERS
ALL COUNTY REFUGEE COORDINATORS
ALL TRIBAL TANF ADMINISTRATORS

SUBJECT: **CALIFORNIA WORK OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO KIDS (CALWORKS) PROGRAM: CHANGES TO THE CAL-LEARN PROGRAM AND WELFARE-TO-WORK (WTW) GOOD CAUSE FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING PARTICIPANTS AS A RESULT OF SENATE BILL (SB) 521**

REFERENCE: [SB 521](#) (CHAPTER 615, STATUTES OF 2023); [WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE \(WIC\) WIC SECTION 11320.31, WIC 11331.5, AND WIC 11332.7](#); [MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES \(MPP\) SECTIONS 42-101, MPP 42-302.1, WIC 42-302.21\(d\), WIC 42-713, WIC 42-763, WIC 42-766.631, WIC 42-766.333, WIC 42-766.62, AND WIC 42-769](#); [ALL COUNTY LETTERS \(ACL\) 14-12 AND ACL 23-30](#); [EDUCATION CODE SECTIONS 66252, 66271.9, AND 66281.7](#); AND [TITLE IX OF THE EDUCATION AMENDMENTS ACT OF 1972 \(20 UNITED STATES CODE \(USC\) SECTION 1681 ET SEQ.\)](#).

The purpose of this All County Letter (ACL) is to provide guidance to counties regarding changes to the CalWORKs Cal-Learn program and good cause for pregnant and parenting participants in the WTW program as a result of [SB 521](#).

As of January 1, 2024, participants in Cal-Learn are no longer subject to a noncompliance process or financial sanctions within the program. In addition, Cal-Learn participants who are in a situation or a crisis that is destabilizing their family are eligible for a Cal-Learn exemption. Additionally, WTW good cause is now available when pregnant or parenting student requires, but is denied or does not receive, pregnancy- or parenting-related accommodations covered under [Title IX](#) and California [Education Code sections 66252, 66271.9, and 66281.7](#).

CAL-LEARN PARTICIPANTS AND SATISFACTORY PROGRESS

Previously, participants in Cal-Learn could face a \$100 financial sanction if they failed to make adequate progress in school or if they failed to submit a required report card to their case worker. With the passage of SB 521 there are no longer sanctions within the Cal-Learn program and case workers must not implement any noncompliance process.

Cal-Learn \$100 bonuses must continue to be issued as detailed in [MPP Section 42-769.1](#) for required participants in Cal-Learn who meet satisfactory progress standards as described in MPP Section [MPP Section 42-766.62](#).

Effective with the release of this letter, exempt or deferred individuals who meet satisfactory progress standards in school will also be eligible for Cal-Learn bonuses. To receive a bonus, report cards must be submitted to a county staff person or case worker within 10 working days from the date the report card is issued by the school. There is no change to the time frames for issuance of Cal-Learn \$100 bonuses.

CAL-LEARN EXEMPTIONS

As of January 1, 2024, in addition to the Cal-Learn exemption reasons described in [MPP Section 42-763.2](#), a participant in Cal-Learn may request an exemption from the program if the participant is in a situation or is experiencing a crisis that destabilizes their family, including but not limited to:

- 1) Homelessness or imminent risk of homelessness.
- 2) A lack of safety due to domestic violence.
- 3) Untreated or undertreated behavioral and mental health needs.
- 4) The misuse of controlled substances or alcohol.

Counties must accept a sworn statement as suitable verification of the above Cal-Learn exemptions.

Previously, a case worker was required to review the exemption status at the end of the projected length of the exemption, or upon the request of the participant, but no less often than every six months. As a result of SB 521, Cal-Learn exemptions must now be subject to annual redetermination, or earlier only if requested by the participant.

Exempt and deferred participants in Cal-Learn should be advised of the differences between being a Cal-Learn participant, versus being a deferred or exempt. Previously, if a participant was in Cal-Learn and either exempt or deferred, they were protected against non-compliance and financial sanction. However, with the elimination of Cal-Learn sanctions, exempt and deferral status may inadvertently have negative impacts. Only deferred participants in Cal-Learn are entitled to continued case management

services. Neither deferred nor exempt individuals qualify for Cal-Learn supportive services.

When a participant in Cal-Learn qualifies for a Cal-Learn exemption due to a situation or crisis destabilizing their family, the County Health and Human Service Agency (HHSA) is reminded they may qualify for Family Stabilization (FS), Homeless Assistance (HA), and the Housing Support Program (HSP), as appropriate. A family does not need to be exempt from Cal-Learn to be eligible for assistance or services under these programs. To be eligible for FS, a participant in Cal-Learn must be in an Assistance Unit with an FS eligible adult; a participant in Cal-Learn cannot be the qualifying adult to establish eligibility for FS. To be eligible for HA or HSP, a CalWORKs family must be experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

WTW GOOD CAUSE

As of January 1, 2024, good cause must now be granted to any WTW participant who is pregnant or parenting and participating in an education activity but who does not receive pregnancy and parenting accommodations in violation of [Title IX](#) or California [Education Code Sections 66252](#), [66271.9](#), or [66281.7](#).

Examples of pregnancy- or parenting-related accommodations include excusing absences because of pregnancy or childbirth for as long as the student's doctor deems the absence medically necessary, or to attend their child's medical appointments. Whether or not the lack of accommodation falls under Title IX or the enumerated Education Code sections, a HHSA must grant good cause when a condition, including but not limited to a lack of accommodation, temporarily prevents or significantly impairs the ability to participate or be regularly employed. For purposes of establishing good cause from WTW activities, a participant's verbal attestation is sufficient to establish that a required pregnancy- or parenting-related accommodation was denied.

Additional information about good cause for lack of accommodations or other workplace or education protections can be found in [ACL 23-30](#).

CALWORKS 60-MONTH TIME CLOCK

Under existing regulations, all adults are subject to the 60-month time on aid limit, with certain exceptions and exemptions. This time limit does not apply to children. Any month an individual is eligible for, participating in, or exempt from Cal-Learn (including 19-year-old voluntary participants) must not count toward the CalWORKs 60-month time on aid limit. This exemption does not apply to 19-year-olds who are eligible for but do not voluntarily participate in Cal-Learn.

[SB 521](#) amended [WIC Section 11332.7](#) to clarify that a month a participant in Cal-Learn participates in the program must not be counted as a month of receipt of aid.

This ACL and other CDSS Letters and Notices are available on the internet on the [CDSS Letters and Notices page](#). If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, please contact the CalWORKs Engagement Bureau at either (916) 654-2137 or CWEngagementPolicy@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By

ALEXIS FERNÁNDEZ GARCIA
Deputy Director
Family Engagement and Empowerment Division