



access
WOMEN'S HEALTH JUSTICE



END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHILDREN BORN INTO POVERTY REPEAL THE CALWORKS MAXIMUM FAMILY GRANT RULE

Just over 20 years ago, California enacted a law denying financial support to babies born while their families are receiving CalWORKs basic needs grants, based on the misguided belief that poor women were having babies in order to receive an additional \$120 per month in assistance. This child exclusion law, referred to as the Maximum Family Grant (MFG) rule, has been proven to have no impact on birth rates among low-income families. Instead, it has been proven to increase and deepen child poverty and deep poverty, causing great harm to children born into poverty and their siblings while restricting the private reproductive decisions of their families.

Excluding infants and children endangers the health and wellbeing of all children in the home.

Children who experience the toxic stress of deep poverty are more likely to experience health and physiological problems than those who do not and may be burdened with cognitive deficits and a reduced ability to cope with challenging situations throughout their lifetimes.

The maximum monthly CalWORKs grant for a family of three is \$638. The average CalWORKs family - similar to the general population - has only 2 children and receives aid for about 2 years. Upon repeal of the rule, most households would receive an additional benefit of \$128/month for a newborn. While recipient households will still live in poverty and be unable to afford basic necessities, this modest could reduce the frequency at which their basic needs would go unmet. *The MFG rule exacerbates poverty and its effects.*

The MFG rule goes against California's support for reproductive freedom and privacy.

California has a long history of supporting women's personal reproductive decisions. By denying basic needs grants to the children of poor women, the MFG rule undermines that longstanding commitment to reproductive freedom and privacy. The only exceptions to the MFG rule - granted for rape, incest, and the failure of certain long-acting contraceptives - also force a woman to choose between receiving aid to feed and clothe her family and disclosing personal medical information. If a child is conceived due to rape or incest, a mother must prove it by disclosing her status as a survivor of sexual assault, which could cause additional, unnecessary emotional pain. All parents, regardless of income, deserve dignity and the right to make decisions that are best and healthiest for themselves and their families without harmful government overreach. *The MFG rule restricts reproductive freedom and denies privacy to low-income women.*

Child exclusion rules like the MFG rule are so ineffective that few other states still employ them.

Out of the 24 states that initially adopted child exclusion policies, eight have now repealed them, citing the policies' ineffectiveness to achieve the intended goal and its impact on reproductive privacy and child wellbeing. Families on CalWORKs are striving to re-enter the workforce, and as California moves out of the recession, the CalWORKs caseload will continue decline. Prior to the recession, families on CalWORKs stayed in the program for an average of two years. But forcing families deeper into poverty by denying them aid for a newborn makes it harder for them to gather the resources they need to become employed and may actually contribute to an increase in caseload.

Repeal of the MFG rule will also free CalWORKs caseworkers to work with families, helping them obtain the services they need to move toward reentering the workforce. Instead of spending their limited time determining whether children are subject to the MFG rule, caseworkers can redirect their efforts toward the core mission of the CalWORKs program, which is to provide transitional support to low-income families. *The MFG rule reduces the effectiveness of the CalWORKs program in moving families toward self-sufficiency.*

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