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CCWRO Welfare News - September 2025 Edition

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Report**

by Tracee Michelle Porter

(originally published in [KnockLA](#) August 19th, 2025)



Update: On September 11, 2025, AB 969 passed the Senate floor with a unanimous 40-0 vote, The bill was enrolled on September 12, 2025, which means the final version approved by both houses is being prepared and sent to Governor Newsom for his signature.

Survivors of domestic and gender-based violence are often forced into impossible choices: stay in a dangerous situation or risk losing financial stability. At a recent hearing, one woman [testified](#) that she stayed in an abusive relationship for 12 years simply because she didn't know she had options.

“If there had been just a poster on the wall or something that said, ‘Are you experiencing domestic violence? You’re not alone. We can help,’ that might have changed everything for me and my kids,” she said.

For those relying on public assistance, the barriers to safety are even steeper.

Domestic Violence Is a Public Crisis

Domestic violence is more than a private tragedy, it’s a public crisis. According to the [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#), nearly 34% of California women and 31% of California men experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Financial abuse is a major factor, occurring in 99% of [domestic violence cases](#). Survivors often find themselves unemployed, unhoused, and struggling to break free from cycles of harm.

The Failures of CalWORKs

California’s CalWORKs program was designed to help families in need, but when it comes to survivors, it has failed. [CalWORKs](#) (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids) is the state’s public assistance program for low-income families. It is partially funded by [TANF](#) (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), the federal welfare program.

But CalWORKs didn’t just emerge in a vacuum. Its roots are tangled up in the [1996 Welfare Reform Act](#), a law shaped by racist stereotypes and sexist assumptions that still poison how assistance works today.

The Racist and Misogynistic Roots of Welfare Reform

“[welfare queen](#)” lie, a prime example of [misogynoir](#) that painted poor Black mothers as manipulative and undeserving, [Clinton](#) doubled down and codified it into federal law. California’s CalWORKs program grew out of that foundation.

When I first wrote about AB 969 in [The Sacramento Bee](#), I focused on how survivors are too often forced to choose between safety and stability. But the story goes deeper. The very structure of our welfare system was built on racist and misogynistic myths that still shape the choices survivors face today.

A System Stuck in the 1950s

The problem isn’t just the racism and sexism baked into the law. It’s that the framework itself is stuck in a 1950s fantasy of family life: a white, hetero, two parent nuclear household. That fantasy never reflected reality for poor families, Black or white, and it’s even more out of touch today, when families take so many different forms, including single parents, queer households, chosen families, immigrant/mixed status, and multigenerational homes.

Survivors of gender-based violence are hit hardest by these outdated definitions because the system prioritizes “keeping families together,” even when that means forcing women and children to stay tied to an abuser.

Those same racist and sexist assumptions show up in CalWORKs itself, where survivors are forced to navigate rules that often put them in greater danger.

Survivors are required to meet work participation requirements and to identify and report the paternity of a violent partner in order to apply for or maintain benefits, putting them at further risk.

How CalWORKs Rules Put Survivors at Risk

CalWORKs allows counties to temporarily waive certain rules for survivors that can put people at greater risk. Survivors may be forced to work a set number of hours or seek child support from a violent partner, just to apply for or keep their benefits. And their 60-month lifetime clock (the total number of months someone is allowed to receive CalWORKs aid) keeps ticking, even while they're in crisis.

Waivers are meant to pause that clock and to lift requirements that can put survivors in danger or keep them trapped in unsafe situations. For example, someone in a shelter without childcare may not be able to meet work rules. Another could face serious harm if forced to cooperate with child support enforcement against their abuser, another requirement under CalWORKs that puts many survivors at risk.

But most survivors don't even know these waivers exist. Whether or not someone gets help often depends on inconsistent practices between counties, partially the result of a lack of clear statewide guidance. Others, like disabled survivors on [SSI](#) (Supplemental Security Income), aren't eligible at all, even though they face the same risks.

How AB 969 Fixes the Problem

[AB 969](#), authored by Assembly Member [Celeste Rodriguez](#) and co-authored by Senator [María Elena Durazo](#), would fix that by expanding eligibility and ensuring that all domestic violence survivors are able to request necessary CalWORKs

request forms across the state.

The bill also directs the [Department of Social Services](#) to create clear, statewide procedures to eliminate confusion and ensure survivors across California receive equal access to support.

These waivers aren't new. They were established in 1996 as part of the federal [Welfare Reform Act](#) through the [Family Violence Option](#). But California has never taken full advantage of them. This isn't just about checking a box or complying with federal welfare rules, it's about ensuring survivors have access to the support they need without unnecessary hurdles.

The Funding Crisis is Silencing Survivor Voices

The urgency behind AB 969 is colliding with a [funding crisis](#) that began under the first Trump administration, when the DOJ, under AG Barr in 2019, [started draining](#) the federal Crime Victims Fund, and continues to devastate survivor services today. In April 2025, the DOJ canceled or slashed more than \$800 million across 365 active grants, many supporting domestic violence advocacy, trauma recovery, and crime-victim services, according to reporting by [The Guardian](#) and [Reuters](#).

In California, those cuts are already being felt. The [California Partnership to End Domestic Violence](#), a co-sponsor of the bill has warned that [VOCA](#) (Victims of Crimes Act) funding will fall by at least \$105 – \$132 million starting in July 2024. Meanwhile, survivor support organizations, especially those led by and for Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ communities, are being forced to choose between staying solvent and staying true to their values.

That's because new DOJ grant conditions pressure organizations to avoid

language about “gender ideology” or race, and to omit programming that centers LGBTQ+ people or communities of color. These mandates silence the very groups doing the most trusted, culturally competent work.

[Paméla Michelle Tate, PhD](#), executive director of [Black Women Revolt Against Domestic Violence](#), refused to sign. Her organization turned down a two-year\$500,000 DOJ grant because of the restrictions.

Tate explained, “We are really struggling with the requirements not to address gender ideology or acknowledge race or the LGBTQ+communities, so much so that we did not apply for DOJ funding because we refused to sign the acknowledgement stating that we would not participate inactivities that encouraged discussion of gender ideology. The funding was for\$250K per year for two years. While we need the money, what profit gains a man if he loses his soul. We will not exclude survivors.”

This isn't just about bureaucracy. It's about erasure. Who gets to be seen as a survivor, and who is asked to disappear in order to be helped?

Why AB 969 Matters Now

Washington may be failing us, but California doesn't have to. Our state can choose to push back against the erasure happening at the federal level. AB 969 is that choice.

So far, the legislature's choice is clear. The bill made it through policy committees in both houses unopposed, and passed the Assembly on a unanimous 79-0 vote. On Friday August 29, 2025, AB 969 was voted out of

12, 2025, which means the final version approved by both houses is being prepared and sent to [Governor Newsom](#) for his signature.

What You Can Do

AB 969 has passed the Legislature unanimously, but survivors still need your voice to push it across the finish line. Contact Governor Newsom today: call, email, and tag him on social media—and urge him to sign AB969 into law. Use the [AB969 Governor's Signature Toolkit](#) for call scripts, email templates, and social media posts.

California Must Deliver on Its Promises

California prides itself on being a progressive leader, but too often, those promises don't translate into real help for the most vulnerable. Survivors should not have to navigate endless red tape to access protections they are already entitled to. Passing AB 969 is a necessary first step towards fixing this problem. Then, the state must ensure the bill is effectively implemented so that survivors don't just see policy changes on paper, but experience real, tangible support in their daily lives.

AB 969 won't undo decades of harm caused by the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, but it's a crucial step forward. California cannot continue to let gaps in the system put people in danger. Every survivor deserves to know their rights and to have the ability to act on them. Without AB 969, survivors will continue to be left behind by a patchwork system that depends on where they live and who happens to pick up their case. Inconsistencies mean more people stay trapped, simply because the help they need is hidden in fine print.

Tracee Michelle Porter is a 2025 SPI State Policy Fellow and Public Voices Fellow with The OpEd Project. She is a writer and advocate working to shift narratives, influence policy, and build Black women's political power through reentry, economic justice, and community-rooted leadership.

California Welfare to Work Sanctions – June 2025

by Kevin Aslanian



Adults in a CalWORKs assistant unit are required to participate in Welfare to Work (WtW) activities. (MPP § 42-701.) When an adult fails to comply with a mandatory WtW program requirement without good cause, the county is required to check that necessary supportive services are available to the adult. Under current law ([WIC § 11323.3](#)) a sanction can only be imposed if the county verifies that the family had childcare when they were asked to participate in a WtW activity. Advocates for WtW sanctioned families report that counties have cases where an adult was sanctioned without childcare being available before imposing the sanction. When the county determines that no good cause exists for a failure to comply and a compliance plan for curing the sanction is not completed, the adult is sanctioned by being removed from the assistance unit. (MPP § 42-721.43.)

[California Budget & Policy Center Reforming CalWORKs Sanctions Can Better](#)

[Support Children and Families](#) report by Sara Kimberlin and Monica Saucedo noted that the families most likely to be sanctioned are those facing the most barriers to employment, such as mental and physical health problems, disabilities and limited education. (Citing Rachel Kirzner, *TANF Sanctions: Their Impact on Earnings, Employment, and Health* [Center for Hunger-Free Communities, Drexel University, March 23, 2015].) A single-parent assistance unit can lose up to \$235 per month or \$2,820 on an annualized basis. (Id.)

Considering that the average CalWORKs family grant (disregarding the number of eligible members of the assistance unit and income) today is \$1,002 a month or about 46% of the federal poverty level, sanctions remove or reduce a family's cash aid, which can lead to homelessness, food insecurity, and health crises. (Citing [Legislative Analyst's Office \(LAO\) 2025-26 Budget CalWORKs Report](#) [February 19, 2025].)

The WtW 25 and the WtW 25A data for June 2025 is published by CDSS using CalSAWS reports. The WtW 25A tracks the number of Two-Parent Families who are enrolled in mandatory WtW employment activities while the WtW 25 tracks the number of All (Other) Families who are enrolled in mandatory WtW employment activities.

The table below from the [WtW25](#) and [WtW25A](#) from CDSS reports, reveals that the California Welfare-to-Work (WTW) program has a statewide 36% sanction rate. **Contra Costa County** reported **734** families being sanctioned while **559** families actively participate in the WtW program. **Alameda County** had **1323** families being sanctioned while **1251** families actively participate in the WtW program. **San Bernardino County** reported **6932** families being sanctioned while **6115** families actively participate in the WtW program.

Work activities 6-29 during the report month.

Non-Compliance- total number of individuals who were sent a notice of noncompliance and have not yet returned to participation or have not yet been sanctioned during the report month.

County	Participants		Compliance	Participants Sanctioned
Statewide	85764	34081	9195	36%
Contra Costa	559	734	22	126%
Alameda	1251	1323	226	90%
San Bernardino	6932	6115	1527	72%
Shasta	171	135	18	71%
Monterey	577	432	155	59%
Imperial	1134	698	161	54%
Merced	966	564	167	50%
Ventura	637	363	101	49%
Fresno	4568	2818	1268	48%
San Joaquin	2233	1161	357	45%
Orange	3318	1509	271	42%
Madera	290	103	11	34%
Los Angeles	28761	9391	2162	30%
San Diego	6092	2072	1049	29%
Butte	692	203	32	28%
Sacramento	7237	1957	213	26%
Kern	2279	527	0	23%
Kings	650	159	63	22%
Riverside	6965	1586	779	20%
Stanislaus	1697	345	96	19%
Solano	427	84	11	19%
Tulare	2267	307	133	13%
Santa Barbara	280	11	11	4%
San Francisco	805	22	0	3%
Santa Clara	No Report			

Counties need to seriously reexamine the purpose of the WtW program and determine if they are actually putting families first. Having more sanctions applied than participants in

Tell Congress to Reinstate the Household Food Security Report by Bob Erlenbusch



On Saturday, September 20, 2025, the USDA announced that it terminated the *Household Food Security Report* calling it “redundant, politicized, and an extraneous study that does nothing but fear monger.”

In reality, this survey, a bi-partisan tool, introduced in the 1990’s is the official government source of how many Americans have - or do not have - enough to eat.

decisions.

The reality under HR 1 is given the cuts to SNAP [Food Stamps], approximately 4 million people in the nation will lose some or all of their SNAP food benefits. According to the Center of Budget Policy Priorities [CBPP] nearly 400,000 Californians will lose some or all of the food assistance benefits.

It is critical for Congress to reinstate the *Household Food Security Report* so that we will have an accurate assessment on how the Republican megabill/OBBB/HR 1's changes to SNAP will impact food insecurity!

ACTION: Contact your congressional representative today and demand that Congress reinstates this report.

Here is [link](#) to CBPP's *Opportunities to Save the Household Food Security Report [talking points and social media sample posts]*

Update on potential government shutdown

As of September 24, 2025, the federal government is 6 days from shutting down if Congress can not reach a spending agreement past September 30, 2025 the end of both federal agencies' fiscal year and a full year continuing resolution.

Odds for a government shutdown increased last week when the Senate Democrats rejected the House-passed measure to fund the government through November 21, 2025. Both chambers are currently on recess and the House is not expected to return until next month.

Additionally, earlier this week, President Trump abruptly canceled a meeting with top Democrats aimed at averting a government shutdown. According to the New Your Times

According to the [Federal News Network](#) neither federal agencies nor the [White House](#) have released any public plans for what would happen in case of a shutdown. Agencies are supposed to release contingency plans, detailing which federal employees would keep working and who would be furloughed.

According to the [Office of Personnel Management](#), neither furloughed federal workers nor those deemed essential and forced to work during a shutdown will be paid during the shutdown, but all federal employees will automatically be granted back pay, once funding resumes, passed on Congressional approval.

Furloughed and excepted federal workers will maintain their health care coverage under the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program. Additionally federal retirees in both the Civil Service Retirement System and Federal Employees Retirement System will continue to receive regularly scheduled annuity payments during a lapse in appropriations.

9/25/2025 Update

According to [Politico](#) (9/25/2025), the White House budget office is instructing federal agencies to prepare reduction-in-forces plans for mass firings during a possible government shutdown, specifically targeting employees who work for programs that are not legally required to continue.

These reduction-in-forces plans go beyond standard furloughs, permanently eliminating job in programs not consistent with Trump's priorities in the event of a shutdown. This is a significant break from how shutdowns have been handled in the past were temporary and employees were brought back once Congress voted to reopen the government and funding was restored.

Programs that will continue regardless of a shutdown include Social Security, Medicare, veterans benefits, military operations, law enforcement, Immigration and Customs and Border Protection and air traffic control.

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