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August 21, 2018

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of the State of California
State Capitol, 1st Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support SB 926 (Skinner) – Request Signature

Dear Governor Brown:

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) supports SB 926 which will ensure that low-income workers who leave work as a result of a violation of their workplace rights are not subject to “voluntary quit” rules in CalFresh or CalWORKs work sanction (for the first 3 months) which would result in a denial of aid for 3-months.

CFPA is a statewide policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. We support improving access to the CalWORKs program, which provides much needed resources for low-income families to meet their basic needs, including healthy food. CalWORKs also helps more low-income households in California participate in CalFresh, the state’s largest and most effective food assistance program.

Employment is the most effective tool to address poverty and recently enacted state laws to establish new worker protections are helping more and more families to exit poverty. Still, nearly 80% of all California families living with low-incomes have earnings from work and too many low-income workers are unaware of their new rights or what they can do to enforce them. According to a survey by the National Employment Law Project, about 43% of workers who tried to organize a union were met with illegal employer retaliation. The UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment has reported that although California law mandates a ten-minute rest break for every four hour shift, 81% of survey respondents experienced this right violated by working off the clock and/or denied their break completely. The Economic Policy Institute reports that low-income women workers are more likely than other workers to experience wage theft.



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While remedies for workers who experience violations of employment laws are available, they can be difficult to access for low-income workers due to legal, financial, and language barriers. Meanwhile, current state law allows counties to deny a person CalFresh or CalWORKs aid for three months if they voluntarily leave employment. Similarly, a person's benefits can be stalled or paused if they voluntarily quit a job while on aid. There are no current requirements to exempt a person from this rule (other than good cause) if they left the job because one of their worker rights were violated and nothing requires a county to educate their recipients who identify that they have had their employment rights violated how to file a complaint with appropriate state or federal entities. SB 926 would require both of these oversights in the law to be addressed by requiring counties to approve a good cause exemption for people from the "voluntary quit" ban on CalFresh aid and, for the first 3 months, from a CalWORKs welfare-to-work sanction if the reason they quit was because their labor rights were violated. It would also require counties to inform low-income workers about how to file a complaint for workplace violations.

California should not punish low-income workers for the lasting effects of discriminatory practices by employers that destabilize their income and well being of their families. For these reasons, CFPA supports SB 926 and respectfully requests your signature.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jared Call". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jared Call, Managing Nutrition Policy Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates

CC: Office of the Honorable Nancy Skinner, California State Senate (Author)
Jessica Bartholow, Western Center on Law and Poverty (Sponsor)