

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Senator Hurtado, Chairperson
Senate Human Services Committee
1020 N Street, Room 521
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support Senate Bill 1065 – Support

Dear Chairperson Hurtado:

The California Food Policy Advocates strongly supports Senate Bill 1065. The bill would expand California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) homeless assistance benefits by broadening eligibility of an entitlement program, increasing the period of assistance to avoid gaps in housing.

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. For over twenty-five years, we have advocated for improved access and participation in the federal nutrition programs, including CalFresh, the state's largest and most effective food assistance program.

California is experiencing a homelessness crisis affecting thousands of families and children across the state. In fact, a 2019 homeless point-in-time count estimated that 8,000 families and 14,000 children were homeless in California last year. The impact of homelessness on children is especially devastating, with issues spanning from hunger, lowered academic achievement, increases in stress and depression, developmental delays, and overall poor mental health.

CalWORKs is the state's largest anti-poverty program, designed to move children out of poverty and help low-income families meet their most basic needs. The Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) within CalWORKs is the only state entitlement program for homeless families with children. HAP provides payments for temporary shelter for up to 16 cumulative days in a 12-month period. Since HAP is often the only lifeline afforded to unhoused families, improving program eligibility is critical to protecting thousands of vulnerable Californians.

In order to receive HAP benefits, families must demonstrate the eviction causing their homeless status is the result of a verified financial hardship stemming from extraordinary circumstances beyond their control. This strict and subjective standard is administered unevenly among applicants and is highly inconsistent with overarching goal of CalWORKs – to ensure children are safely cared for with their families. Further, families that do receive HAP assistance are often forced back into homelessness if they do not secure permanent housing within the rigid 16-day timeframe. Lastly, families experiencing domestic violence are entitled to 32-days of HAP support, yet some are arbitrarily limited to the standard 16-days.

SB 1065 increases options for California's poorest families with children by making small, yet significant adjustments to the critical safety-net that is the Homeless Assistance Program. Specifically, the bill repeals the subjective hardship standard, extends the assistance period to the end of the month for families that have secured imminent permanent housing, and ensures all domestic violence victims receive their entitled 32-days of assistance.

For these reasons the California Food Policy Advocates urges an "yes" vote for SB 1065.

Sincerely,



Betzabel Estudillo
Senior Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates

CC: Honorable Bob Hertzberg, California State Senate (Author)
Cynthia Castillo, Office of Senator Hertzberg