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June 4, 2019

Honorable Melissa Hurtado
Chair, Human Services Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 2054 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support Assembly Bill 944 (Quirk)

Dear Chairperson Hurtado,

California Food Policy Advocates supports Assembly Bill 944 and we are writing to urge your support. This bill would require county human services agencies to renew the 12-month exception period for an indigent exemption in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program to the extent allowed by Section 1631 of Title 8 of United States Code and implementing guidance.

California Food Policy Advocates (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. Drawing on our core understanding that there are many social, political, and economic determinants of poverty, food insecurity, and poor health, CFPA employs a variety of advocacy strategies to fulfill our mission. We believe AB 955 will further our mission by extending greater economic opportunity to legal permanent residents who, under CalWORKs' current sponsor deeming law, stand to lose vital benefits.

The CalWORKs program was established to protect low-income families with children from the harm of poverty and to provide opportunities for parents to prepare for and secure stable employment with a living wage. Federal law provides that the income of a sponsor for a lawful permanent resident applying for federally funded TANF be counted in the determination of whether or not a family's income falls below 130% of FPL and in determining their monthly CalWORKs grant. Federal law and guidance also establishes that lawful permanent residents who are determined to be indigent are exempt from sponsor deeming for 12 month periods, and requires no limit to that exemption. This is how the CalFresh program operates, and the same rules should be extended to CalWORKs.

AB 944 will clarify the intent of the law as providing for the full relief available under federal law and guidance and, as a result, reduce the impact of poverty on children and their families. For these reasons, we are supportive of this bill and respectfully urge your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gabrielle Tilley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end of the last word.

Gabrielle Tilley
Policy Advocate
California Food Policy Advocates

CC: Honorable Bill Quirk, California State Assembly (Author)
Jessica Bartholow, Western Center on Law and Poverty (co-sponsor)