INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Put on your letterhead, edit and adapt as you like, but **be sure to keep the font at 13 pt. Century Gothic and single spaced!**
2. Send the letter via email to Leg.unit@gov.ca.gov with the bill number in the subject line
3. Please send a copy of your letter to Norma Palacios at npalacios@drugpolicy.org

Thank you!!

September X, 2023
The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814
Via Email to Leg.unit@gov.ca.gov

Re: SB 521 (Smallwood-Cuevas) – Request for Signature

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of **[Insert the name of your organization]**, I write in strong support for SB 521: CalWORKs: Pregnancy or Parenting by Senator Smallwood-Cuevas. This bill extends protections for pregnant, parenting, and lactating students in the CalWORKs and Cal-Learn programs. Specifically, SB 521 requires a "good cause" determination from CalWORKs sanctions imposed on students who are not being adequately accommodated under Title IX. In addition, SB 521 eliminates sanctions entirely for Cal-Learn teens and adds to the list of possible exemptions from participation in the program when the teen faces a destabilizing event such as homelessness, domestic violence, or an untreated or undertreated behavioral health issue.

[Explain the connection of your organization to the issue that the bill seeks to address]

The improvements in SB 521 to ensure that exempt and deferred students in our protections from sanctions receive supportive services such as counseling and case management and extending the quarterly $100

bonuses to all Cal-Learn participants are important as the student-parent population is often overlooked, and despite recent changes in the law, these families are not always met with the supportive services and protections to which they are entitled.

National data demonstrates that student parents, especially those who are single parents, experience financial instability, have less money to contribute to the cost of college, have much greater unmet needs after receiving financial aid, and amass higher levels of student debt than other students.[1] The student-parent population are non-traditional students that must juggle work and family responsibilities to go to school to secure a better future for themselves and their children.

For many student parents in California, CalWORKs and Cal-Learn represent vital safety nets that provide them the economic resources needed to attend school. In order to receive benefits through CalWORKs, recipients must meet a certain number of hours through employment or by attending school. However, without Title IX accommodations, student parents in CalWORKs may not be able to meet their work hour requirement, and as a result, face sanctions that subject them to the loss of vital financial assistance. A recent analysis by the California Budget Center demonstrates that CalWORKs sanctions push approximately 60,000 children into poverty each month.[2]

Title IX is a federal law that applies to most academic institutions across the state and provides that colleges cannot discriminate against student parents. The law also requires academic institutions to provide accommodations to pregnant, parenting, and lactating students, such as

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[1] Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2012). Single Student Parents Face Financial Difficulties, Debt,
Without Adequate Aid. Retrieved from
https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/C394-Student-Parents-and-Financial-Aid.pdf

[2] Kimberlin, S. & Saucedo, M. (2023). Reforming CalWORKs Sanctions Can Better Support Children and Families. Retrieved from
https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/reforming-calworks-sanctions-can-better-support-children-and-families/

allowing students excused absences and the ability to make up work when their parenting duties conflict with class. Yet students are not always being accommodated, which can negatively impact their academic progress and result in sanctions through CalWORKs that decrease the financial supports they rely on to care for their families.

In addition, as teen parents, Cal-Learn recipients often face challenges such as homelessness, domestic violence, or untreated behavioral health conditions. These destabilizing events place additional barriers to students seeking to earn their high school diplomas. Sanctioning them in their greatest time of need ultimately harms their family further rather than helping them overcome these challenges and stay in school.
By extending protections from sanctions for pregnant, parenting and lactating CalWORKs and Cal-Learn students, SB 521 will help student parents maintain the economic resources they need to stay on track academically. This bill will address existing gaps in the law and strengthen the safety net for student parents, especially those who come from communities that have historically lacked economic stability, so that they can continue their education and find meaningful employment opportunities to achieve increased social mobility for their families.

SB 521 moved through both the Senate and Assembly with no opposition and bipartisan support.

For the above reasons, we respectfully request that you sign SB 521 into law. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

NAME
TITLE
ORGANIZATION

cc: Office of Senator Smallwood-Cuevas via Jasmine.Prasad@sen.ca.gov