

California's poor getting poorer because of state budget

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

Things just got bleaker for California's poorest residents.

CalWORKs, the state's "welfare to work" program, took a major hit in the state budget deal that Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law Thursday, reducing grants to their lowest levels in more than 20 years.

Beginning today, monthly grants will be slashed by 8 percent, to an average of \$460 for a family of three. That translates to an income that is less than 30 percent of the amount the federal government has determined is necessary to meet basic needs.

In addition, the new budget reduces the lifetime limit on CalWORKs cash assistance for adults from five years to four, and cuts funding for employment services and child care. Advocates also are lamenting the suspension of the Cal Learn program, which offers aid to pregnant and parenting teens in an effort to keep them in school.

Welfare officials said the cuts will make it more difficult to accomplish the CalWORKs mission of offering temporary cash aid, job training and other help to lift people from public assistance to independence. Some 1.5 million Californians get CalWORKs benefits.

"We are taking people who live on the bare minimum as it is, and they are going back to 1987 levels in funding," said Nancy O'Hara, assistant director of Yolo County's Department of Employment and Social Services. "Who can live on that?"

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