

AB 1957 (Berman)

Social Services Modernization, Efficiency, and Due Process Protection Act

SUMMARY

AB 1957 would modernize state laws governing communication for public social services, while ensuring the rights of applicants and recipients are protected. Specifically, AB 1957 would define applicants' and recipients' rights to opt-in to electronic communication and to end electronic communication when they no longer want it. It would also direct counties to maximize electronic means of verifying information.

BACKGROUND

CalFresh provides monthly food benefits for qualified low-income households to purchase healthy food. California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) provides cash aid to help families pay for housing, toiletries, and other necessities.

Low-income families face significant communication barriers, but new methods such as text and other electronic technologies represent accessible, efficient, and commonplace options for low-income communities.

California's Department of Social Services (DSS) and county human services agencies have been leaders in increasing access to applications, forms, and notices electronically, telephonically, and via computer-generated text message, which has improved efficiency for county workers and lead to greater outcomes for applicants and recipients.

CalFresh and CalWORKs are our first line of defense against hunger and basic needs deprivation among our state's most vulnerable residents. While county human services agencies adapt to modern communication methods, it is important that the rights of applicants and recipients of public social service programs are clearly defined.

THIS BILL

AB 1957 would codify existing practices into state law by establishing communication procedures for public social services—including CalFresh and CalWORKs—that reflect modern technology. AB 1957 would allow public social services applicants and recipients to opt-in to electronic communication, including emails and computer-generated text messages.

To protect the rights of applicants and recipients who may not have access to email, phone, or internet service, AB 1957 would stipulate that counties must allow applicants and recipients to affirmatively choose to receive electronic communication.

To ensure efficiency, AB 1957 would direct counties to maximize existing public human service databases to verify information, while restricting the use of privately maintained databases in order to protect the privacy and accuracy of applicant and recipient information.

SUPPORT

Western Center on Law and Poverty (sponsor)
California Association of Food Banks (sponsor)
Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations (sponsor)

OPPOSITION

None on file

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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