

Opinion: Welfare rules should reflect modern reality

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For California legislators who want to help the unemployed get back to work and provide relief to financially strapped counties at the same time, Assembly Bill 1182 moves our state in the right direction.

The measure by Assemblyman Roger Hernandez, D-West Covina, would eliminate the \$4,650 vehicle asset limit for welfare eligibility. Fifteen other states have already done so. But in California, a person is not eligible for welfare if they own a car worth \$4,650 or more, a limit that has not been adjusted in 15 years. It is among the lowest in the nation. Only Texas and Idaho are stingier.

Beyond denying government assistance to needy people, the car asset test imposes a costly burden on counties whose welfare eligibility workers spend an estimated 15 to 30 minutes determining the worth of a car every time they process a CalWORKs application, and again and again at every six-month CalWORKs renewal period.

The rule also hurts people trying to get a job. The lack of reliable transportation is a major barrier to employment. Any car worth \$4,650 or less is likely to be a piece of junk, unreliable, constantly in need of repairs.

It's that reality that prompted Assemblyman Kevin Jeffries, R-Lake Elsinore, to break with the majority of his GOP colleagues and vote for the Hernandez bill. Jeffries says he would have preferred a bill that raised the cap, not eliminated it. Nonetheless he voted for it because, he said, "This is California, you need a reliable vehicle to seek work

or maintain a job.”

Five other Republicans in the Assembly joined Jeffries to support the bill. Assemblywoman Beth Gaines of Roseville was not one of them.

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