



**Office of
Domestic
Social
Development**

**Catholic
Charities
USA**



Background on Welfare Policy: TANF Reauthorization February 2007

ISSUE

Our nation's welfare policies play an important role in serving the common good by addressing the needs of the most vulnerable families among us – the moral measure of any society. In 1996, a new welfare program based on state block grants, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. TANF eliminated the AFDC entitlement to assistance, mandated work as a condition of receiving benefits, imposed time limits and sanctions, focused on family formation issues, and placed most of the control over administering welfare into the hands of the states. In February 2006, the program was reauthorized through September, 2010, with several program changes.

BACKGROUND

Work provisions: The percentage of TANF recipients that must be engaged in specific “work activities” for states to avoid penalties (cuts in the TANF grant) was increased. In order for a state to get credit for work activities performed by a given TANF participant, the participants must work a minimum number of hours per week – 30 hours for most people. Both the list of specific work activities and the number of hours recipients must work each week were unchanged. States are now required to apply these work rules to state-funded welfare programs, as well as federal program.

The changes in the TANF work rules will mean that many states will face immediate and significant increases in the percentage of TANF families that have to meet the hourly work requirements each month, or else face a reduction in the state federal TANF grant. To meet the new requirements, many states may have to create adequate work programs for TANF recipients, but no new resources were provided for this purpose. Other states may feel pressure to reduce caseloads to meet the new requirements, by making it harder for families to get on or stay on TANF.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) was given new authority to set regulations on whether activities qualify as allowable work activities, tracking and reporting on hours worked, and whether to include child-only cases when calculating state work participation rates. HHS published new regulations in June 2006.

Supports for Working Families: For families leaving welfare, the availability of work supports, such as child care, health care, and food stamps, can be a key to making a lasting transition to self-sufficiency. The transitional Medicaid program for families leaving TANF has been extended through June, 2007. Child care

funding was increased by only \$200 million per year, not nearly enough to make sure both TANF recipients and low-income working families have access to needed child care.

Fairness for Legal Immigrants: Legal immigrants continue to face a five-year waiting period before they can apply for TANF. The Catholic community has long advocated for the availability of basic necessities to all those in need, regardless of their race, creed, ethnic origin, or nationality, and we have worked to restore necessary benefit eligibility for legal immigrants.

Marriage and Family Issues: The Catholic community has consistently affirmed the vital importance of marriage for raising children. Children do better economically, emotionally, and spiritually when raised by parents in the context of a stable, healthy marriage. The changes in the TANF work rules are likely to make it harder for two-parent families to receive TANF – they are subject to tougher work rules than single parent families, and states have less flexibility than they used to to create separate programs for two-parent families that do not meet the requirements. The “family cap” – which allows states to deny TANF benefits to children born while their family is receiving assistance, violating both pro-life and social justice principles – remains in the law. On the positive side, there is new funding for programs to support healthy marriages and strong families and for effective fatherhood programs.

USCCB/CCUSA POSITION

USCCB and CCUSA support welfare policies that: Protect human life and dignity; strengthen family life; encourage and reward work; preserve a safety net for the vulnerable; build public/private partnerships to overcome poverty; and invest in human dignity.

ACTION REQUESTED

- As States make changes in TANF rules and programs to comply with the new federal rules, work with community organizations, local advocates and state officials to make sure new policies help, don't hurt, families on TANF.
- Support efforts to increase child care funding.
- Support efforts to bring the rules for two-parent families in line with those for single parent families.
- Continue to work on efforts to make TANF benefits available to all legal immigrants.
- Continue to work at the state and federal level to end the “family cap.”
- Work to improve education and training opportunities for TANF recipients.
- Watch for alerts on the temporary Medicaid assistance and abstinence education programs, which were only extended through June, 2007.

RESOURCES

Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform; Putting Children and Families First ; TANF Reauthorization comments submitted to HHS by SDWP and by CCUSA, at www.usccb.org and www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.

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