
The Pennsylvania Welfare Coalition

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The Well-being of Pennsylvania Families, and the Fiscal Health of the Commonwealth Linked to Mandated Work Hours Decision

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Issue:

The well-being fiscal integrity of Pennsylvania families and the fiscal health of the Commonwealth will both be directly impacted by Congressional decisions regarding the mandated hours of work hours required for all TANF recipients.

Scope of the Problem: Congressional action might well lead to a dramatic increase in the work hours required of TANF recipients from the current 30-hours per week to a mandated 40-hour work week. Such efforts would reduce states' flexibility to implement effective welfare-to-work programs, greatly increase state costs, and significantly harm individual families.

Increased work requirements ignore the lessons learned during the first stage of welfare reform. An increase in hours will simply divert critical resources away from newly crafted, effective programs that help TANF recipients overcome barriers and develop the work skills necessary to leave welfare, to "make-work" programs that will merely keep them busy. There is no research or other evidence that links increased work hour requirements to improved employment outcomes. Additionally, the policy debate on increased work hours continues to dismiss disappointing employment trends for low wage workers, ignoring escalating unemployment and underemployment realities facing too many Pennsylvanians. Ironically, while Congress debates increasing mandatory work hours, many TANF recipients who are desperately seeking to work full time, often find that full time work is not available.

Increased work requirements could be fiscally devastating for the Commonwealth. Overall the Commonwealth's bipartisan estimates of the cost of H.R. 240 (and identical bills in the 107th and 108th Congress) have consistently estimated a \$350 million price tag for the state. The costs would result from creating "the necessary job programs, community service and paid work opportunities, and increased child care capacity to meet a 40 hour a week work requirement." CBO estimates are that "engaging an individual in work activities would cost an average of \$4,200 in 2010." At a time when taxpayers are already facing cuts in essential local services, Pennsylvania simply cannot afford these costs without displacing vital programs.

Increased work requirements are unrealistic and will prove harmful to Pennsylvania families. The community and faith-based social service providers represented by the Pennsylvania Welfare Coalition report that most of the single parents on TANF simply cannot work more hours. These human service workers find that, as the most able parents leave TANF for wages, an increasing proportion of the TANF population consists of highly stressed families with multiple health problems and serious family problems that demand a great deal of time and attention (including court appearances, children's schooling and disciplinary issues, and behavioral health treatment). Families' competing health care needs, child care and school related challenges make full-time work attendance an enormous challenge for this vulnerable population. Many parents cannot adequately care for their families and meet the current work requirements. Additional hours for these struggling families will not lead to sustained self-sufficiency or family well-being but rather to an increase in sanctions and deeper poverty.

We urge:

- Maintain the current 30-hour work week requirement. If such a remedy eludes the Senate, then assure a pre-conference agreement stipulating that the final TANF bill will not exceed 34 hours.
- Retention of the 20 hour work requirement for parents with children under age six.