



Fact Sheet

Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs ***"First and foremost, [welfare reform] should be about moving people from welfare to work." – President Bill Clinton, August 22, 1996***

Courtesy of the Committees on Ways and Means and Education and the Workforce

BACKGROUND:

Sixteen years ago, a Republican-led Congress worked with a Democratic President to fix a broken welfare system. President Bill Clinton rallied the nation to "end welfare as we know it" and his call to action was well founded. Under the old system, 65 percent of families were dependent on welfare for an average of eight years or more, and individuals obtained welfare benefits for an average of 13 years throughout the course of a lifetime. Due to a lack of focus on work, failed welfare policies left families trapped in a cycle of dependency and poverty.

In response, Congress passed and President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PL 104-193). The law replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program. The bipartisan law promoted work as a central focus of helping low-income families achieve self-sufficiency. Individuals were required to work, prepare for work, or look for work as a condition of receiving public assistance. In the years following passage of the 1996 bipartisan welfare reforms:

- The number of individuals receiving welfare [dropped](#) by 57 percent;
- Poverty among all single mothers [fell](#) by 30 percent;
- Poverty among black children [dropped](#) to its lowest level in 2001; and
- Employment and earnings among single mothers [increased](#) significantly.

These facts highlight the success of welfare reforms that should be strengthened by Congress.

THE PROBLEM:

Despite moving millions of Americans off government dependency and into a job, welfare reform is now under attack from the Obama administration. A memorandum released on July 12, 2012 by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) allows states to seek a waiver from the work requirements central to the success of welfare reform. Under the guise of state flexibility, the president is unilaterally weakening efforts to assist needy families. Flaws with the Obama administration's waiver proposal include:

(More)

- **Waiving critical work requirements without any legal basis.** Current law provides limited and explicit waiver authority to the HHS Secretary. Nowhere does the law state the secretary can waive Section 407 of the Social Security Act, which outlines federal work requirements. In fact, no administration has claimed it can waive the law's work requirements since reform was enacted more than 15 years ago – at least not until now. Not only is the administration claiming to have power not granted in the law, it is attempting to do so through an end run around Congress. The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office [determined](#) that the administration's waiver policy is a rule and therefore subject to Congressional disapproval under the Congressional Review Act.
- **Taking us back to the days when some states gamed the system.** A 2005 Government Accountability Office [study](#) found some states were claiming personal journaling, bed rest, and weight loss as work activities. In 2006, Congress required the HHS Secretary to strengthen the department's oversight of how states determine appropriate work activities, verify the number of hours worked and determine who is able to work. The president's waiver scheme could open the door to new abuses of taxpayer dollars under the auspices of helping impoverished families.
- **Unwinding years of progress in moving families from welfare to work.** Nearly 23 million Americans are struggling to find a full time job in the Obama economy. Even in the midst of a persistently weak economy, the percentage of children in female-headed households living in poverty today is [lower](#) than before welfare reform was signed into law. Instead of providing support that will help unemployed Americans move into employment, the president's executive overreach will lead to more dependency for those struggling the most under his failed policies. President Obama should work with Congress on solutions that will create jobs and expand opportunity, not circumvent Congress to advance controversial policies that lead to more dependence and less hope for the American people.

THE SOLUTION:

Congress cannot allow the Obama administration to circumvent the law and roll back critical features of welfare reform. That is why House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp (R-MI), along with Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN) and Republican Study Committee Chairman Jim Jordan (R-OH) introduced a resolution that will block the administration from implementing its controversial waiver scheme.

H. J. Res. XXX

This important resolution will:

- ✓ Express Congress's disapproval of the Obama administration's regulatory effort to weaken welfare reform;
- ✓ Prevent the administration from implementing its plan to waive the work requirements of the 1996 welfare reform law; and
- ✓ Preserve critical reforms that have helped lift millions of American families out of poverty.

According to a [recent survey](#), more than 80 percent of the American people support the work requirements at the heart of welfare reform. These reforms have raised earnings, lowered poverty, and reduced government dependence. H. J. Res. XXX ensures this progress is not undermined by President Obama's misguided executive overreach.

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