



Fact Sheet

Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act ***"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:

Seventeen years ago, a Republican-led Congress worked with President Bill Clinton to fix a broken welfare system. President 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 obtaining 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 failed 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 point toward successful 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. "Guidance" released by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in July 2012 allows states to seek a waiver from the work requirements critical 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:

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- **Waiving critical work requirements without any legal basis.** Current welfare reform 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 17 years ago – at least not until now. If Congress wanted to allow the work requirements to be waived, it would have said so in the law.
- **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, as well as on verifying the number of hours worked and determining who is able to work. The president's waiver scheme could open the door to new abuses of taxpayer dollars under the auspices of more “flexibility” in helping impoverished families.
- **Unwinding years of progress in moving families from welfare to work.** More than 12 million Americans are struggling to find a job in the Obama economy. Even in the midst of a persistently weak economy, there are fewer children in female-headed households living in poverty today 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 personal 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 do an end run around the law and roll back critical reforms that have lifted millions of Americans out of poverty. 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 Steve Scalise (R-LA) and Steve Southerland (R-FL) introduced the Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act of 2013 on February 28, 2013.

Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act of 2013

This important legislation will:

- ✓ Prevent the Secretary of Health and Human Services from finalizing, implementing, enforcing, or taking any action outlined in the July 12, 2012 “guidance” that would undermine welfare work requirements;
- ✓ Prohibit the secretary from authorizing, approving, renewing, modifying, or extending any effort that waives compliance with the work requirements of the 1996 welfare reform law; and
- ✓ Rescind any waiver granted to a state before the Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act becomes law, ensuring a level playing field for all families in need of assistance.

According to a [2012 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. The Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act ensures this progress is not undermined by President Obama's misguided executive overreach.