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US House Ways and Means Committee
Getting Incentives Right: Connecting Low-Income Individuals with Jobs
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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I really appreciate being able to share my thoughts and reflections on TANF and incentives for helping low-income individuals secure jobs that will help them and their families leave welfare, become economically self-sufficient and exit poverty. These are issues I have spent most of my career researching since the mid-1970s. Of course, these are my views, not those of the University of Texas at Austin or any of my funders.

The gist of my testimony this morning is as follows:

- I'm not here to revisit the 1990s debates around the Personal Responsibility Act and TANF. We now have a wealth of information that we can use to shape more effective policy and program responses. Information about TANF, about effective new workforce strategies, and about labor market dynamics and how they affect families' chances for success.
- Simply "*connecting*" low-income individuals with jobs is no longer sufficient and likely hasn't been for some time. We need to help them prepare for and gain access to good jobs offering good pay and career advancement opportunities. This is the best way to help them and their children succeed economically.
- As currently structured, TANF does too little to help poor families succeed and, in fact, often acts as a barrier to their success. Even without spending more, existing TANF resources could be deployed more effectively to help these families with some straightforward policy changes, particularly if states could be induced to stop diverting TANF to other purposes and instead, expend more of their scarce TANF dollars directly supporting families and investing in their human capital. That said, more resources clearly would help as well.
- Rigorous evidence suggests that career pathway and sectoral strategies, which are becoming more common across the country and are strongly encouraged under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, are highly effective approaches to helping such families succeed over time.
- Also, two-generation strategies, as championed by the Aspen Institute's Ascend Program (of which I was an inaugural Fellow) and embodied in Tulsa's Career*Advance*® Program, offer a highly promising approach to addressing multi-generational poverty and could serve as one important model for TANF going forward. With the right policies in place, TANF could more easily partner with state and local WIOA, Head Start, Early Head Start, childcare and other federal/state programs to help parents and children move ahead together.
- In the absence of changes in TANF policy, poor families face an increasingly inhospitable labor market in which they are forced to compete for low-paying jobs offering few opportunities for economic advancement. They and their children will suffer continuing disadvantage.

- Recommended changes to TANF include:
  - Changing TANF work participation to include postsecondary education, adult basic education, ESL and training for high-wage jobs as work activities. This would also include time spent in class, doing homework, etc.
  - Revising TANF reporting outcomes to include credential attainment, employment, employment retention and earnings.
  - Aligning TANF measurement with WIOA and other programs using common metrics.

TANF: The Promise and Practice of Welfare Reform

When the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was signed into law in August 1996 after considerable debate, it was the most significant reform of the nation's welfare system in six decades. One of the more important themes to emerge in the debate about the role of welfare in the 1990s concerned tightening up on welfare eligibility and requiring more "personal responsibility" on the part of recipients, in return for which they would be treated as the "deserving poor."[1] I think it fair to say that very poor families generally lived up to their end of this social bargain, while policymakers at all levels did not in many respects.[2]

One aspect of the new Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) law that originally appeared to have some basis in research was what came to be known as 'work-first', a family of approaches that stressed light-touch, labor force attachment services for welfare mothers before putting them into jobs in the belief that they would "get a job, get a better job, get a career." In hindsight it appears the evidence for the effectiveness of work-first was based on measurement periods that were too short for even the most rigorous evaluations to capture the true impacts of the treatment.[3] Using longer outcome measurement periods, the impacts of labor force attachment programs on employment and earnings tended to fade and that those of skills oriented human capital investments tended to grow and endure.[4] More on this shortly.

TANF Funds Accounting. After responding reasonably well to the challenges presented by TANF in the early years of implementation, over the ensuing decades, governors and state legislatures appear to have increasingly diverted their federal and state TANF dollars to pay for many other things. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (2015), in 2014 states only spent 8% of their TANF funds on Work-related Activities and Supports. Even counting spending on other core purposes of TANF, like basic assistance and child care, states spent less than half their funds on what are referred to as core purposes, and fully 34% of their TANF dollars were spent on Other, e.g., child welfare, early education, after-school programs. To the extent that such spending furthers poor families' efforts to succeed, this can be a good thing. However, there are indications that federal TANF dollars may be displacing state expenditures on these areas, especially as their budgets have felt the strain of recessions, aggressive state tax cuts and, recently, falling oil and gas prices. It is also the case that the value of federal TANF dollars has eroded considerably over time due to inflation and that loss of resources to support work has been seriously exacerbated by state diversion.

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[1] For an excellent discussion of these issues, see Moffitt (2014).

[2] Moffitt (2014) shows that in fact the US increased its spending on the deserving poor over the past two decades, especially considering tax expenditures for the EITC. However, single mother families and those with low employment and earnings were generally not included in this largess: they aren't seen as "deserving".

[3] For a summary report on the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS), see Hamilton (2001).

[4] Again, Heinrich and King (2011).

Work Participation Requirements. TANF's work participation requirements also have made it difficult to use TANF work dollars for an array of education and training activities and to coordinate TANF resources with other federal and state programs that would help poor families succeed in today's labor market.

The application of TANF work participation requirements also occurred at roughly the same time that the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 was being rolled out nationally with its new sequence-of-service, outcome performance reporting, and eligible training provider requirements. The combination of these requirements discouraged community colleges from engaging fully early on in the process and ultimately contributed to a decline in spending on training when compared to earlier workforce programs.[5]

Meanwhile, it's instructive to look at participation in TANF and the labor market behavior of low-income families over the almost two decades since TANF became the law of the land. First, as Center for Budget and Policy Priorities tabulations show, TANF caseloads have declined by almost two-thirds since 1996 to just 1.7 million families in 2014, even as the number of families in poverty and deep poverty has increased.[6] Second, the number of poor families receiving TANF has fallen to very low levels across the states. Only about 26 families in poverty out of every 100 receive benefits now compared to 68 such families in 1996; in my home state, Texas, only about 5 poor families out of 100 receive TANF. Third, TANF served the country's poor families very poorly during the Great Recession: caseloads increased modestly, but the burden was borne more by the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) or food stamps than by TANF.

Yet, poor women with children responded in just the way that policymakers had asked and they did so resoundingly.[7] As I have noted (2006, p. 14):

> "Welfare recipients and single moms generally have worked and participated in education and related activities at higher rates than in earlier periods…. for decades single women without children have had the highest rates of participation in the labor force with rates averaging 75-77 percent. Participation rates for single women with children under 18 years, which had been much lower, began to move up in 1991 and increased dramatically after 1993, surpassing those of single childless women in 1999. Single mothers aged 20-55 years now [2005] exhibit the highest rates of labor force participation, with rates that appear to be moving higher still. Such rapid, substantial and sustained shifts in labor force participation are unusual for any group. Clearly, these mothers have done their part."

And, as the following Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (2015) figure shows, never-married mothers aged 20-49 years with a high school education or less also closed the gap in employment or work rates with single mothers without young children over the 1990s. It is important to recognize that the uptick in labor force participation and employment rates began well before TANF was implemented and was fueled in major ways by factors including the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, the rise in spending for subsidized child care, and a booming economy. The Great Recession took a toll on many American families, not the least poor families headed by single mothers. The rates for both never-married and single women without children fell in tandem then leveled off as the economy began to improve in 2010-2011.

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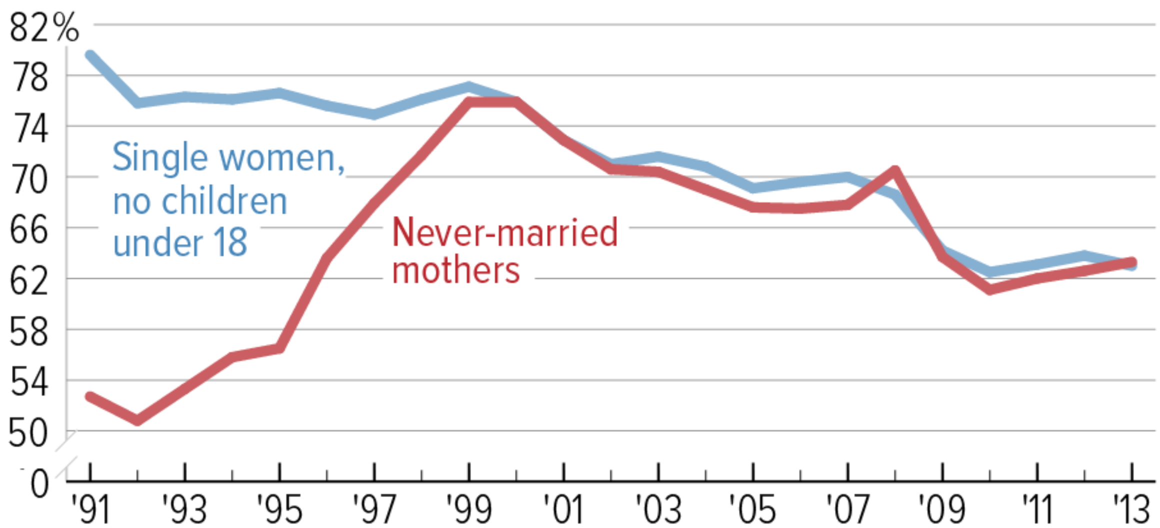
[5] See Barnow and King (2005).
[6] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2015), p. 3.
[7] For example, see Blank (2002), King (2006), and Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (2015).

In terms of labor force participation, poor moms with young children no longer look any different from women without children.

Never-Married Mothers' Work Rates Jumped in 1990s but Have Fallen Since

Percent of women between the ages of 20 and 49 with a high school education or less with any work during the year



Source: CBPP analysis of Current Population Survey.

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Finally, my colleague Peter Mueser with the University of Missouri and I conducted an intensive analysis of welfare and work patterns in large urban counties in six states over the 1990s for our book, *Welfare and Work: Experiences in Six Cities* (Upjohn Institute, 2005). We examined linked administrative records for welfare, employment and earnings in core counties in Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Fort Lauderdale, Houston, and Kansas City. Among our findings:

- State time limits pushed people from the rolls, even as mandatory programs helped recipients build job skills and obtain employment. Welfare exit rates rose in all areas, but the largest increase was in Ft. Lauderdale due to Florida's 'hard' 2-year time limit on welfare receipt.
- At each of the sites, increases in the welfare exit rate alone would have produced caseload declines, ranging from 30 to 64%. Declines in the numbers entering welfare from so-called 'diversion' programs contributed substantially as well, causing caseloads to fall by 20 to 71%.
- Employment rates for welfare exiters increased in all sites between 1994 and 1997, but changed little between 1997 and 1999. Increases were dramatic in some of the sites, rising to around 50% or over in all sites as compared with only 23% nationally. Moderate increases in the employment rates for welfare leavers in the face of the

extraordinary economic growth in the 1990s do not suggest unprecedented opportunity for those who left welfare.

- Only about half of all jobs secured by welfare recipients at these sites last beyond the quarter in which they start. Only 4-10% of jobs lasted eight (8) quarters or more. In three of the five sites for which sufficient data were available, the number of such long-term jobs declined. Although these results suggest a decline in the quality of jobs welfare recipients obtained, similar declines occurred for other nonwelfare workers who secured jobs paying comparable wages at the same time with the same employers.
- The kinds of jobs welfare recipients obtain did not seriously deteriorate over the 1990s, but neither were there substantial improvements in terms of job stability or earnings.
- By any standard, the jobs obtained by welfare recipients were very poor ones. Over the life of the job—up to two years for our data—average cumulative earnings were only between $2,000 (Atlanta) and $5,000 (Chicago). Few of these jobs were likely to lead to economic self-sufficiency for mothers with one or more dependents. Some individuals may obtain sufficient earnings to move off of welfare and support their families if they succeed in cobbling together multiple low-paying jobs into a semi-steady earnings stream. Others may stumble onto a good job only after many tries. *Getting a "good job"—one with a "good" employer in a "good" industry—makes a real difference.*

What of other workforce development and work-oriented strategies that might help low-income families succeed in the labor market?

Effective Workforce Development Strategies for Low-Income Individuals

Policymakers and program administrators are actively engaged in designing and implementing far more effective workforce development strategies that are based on an emerging body of evidence that they produce large and lasting impacts on employment, earnings and related outcomes of interest, e.g., qualifying for UI benefits—as the first-tier "safety net", filing fewer UI claims. Multiple studies indicate that career pathway strategies imbedded in sectoral strategies, and associated 'bridge' programs for remedial preparation, produce solid results.[8] The US Department of Labor now strongly encourages states and local workforce boards to utilize these strategies as part of the nation's workforce development system under WIOA. USDOL is also deploying technical assistance and capacity building strategies to assist those states and local areas that may be a bit behind in implementing them to get moving.

These strategies began emerging several decades ago as part of a *family of strategies* to help employers find workers with right mix of skills to become and remain competitive and to assist low-income, low-skilled workers succeed in college and the labor market.[9] *Sector strategies* came first in the early 1980s and 1990s as a response to employers' needs to aggregate demand for common skills within sectors to rationalize and make existing workforce services more efficient. Their early focus was on more skilled and educated workers. *Career pathway strategies*—structured, sequential training and education opportunities to help workers gain skills for continued advancement—followed in the mid-1990s and 2000s. These strategies are typically based in postsecondary education institutions and focus more on low-income, low-skilled students. They attempt to make course sequences more rational and transparent and to use stackable, transferable credentials. Convergence and integration of sector and career pathway strategies, and the addition of so-called 'bridge' programs for remedial education (e.g. I-BEST) came later. Depending on participants' skill levels at enrollment, it can take anywhere from a few months to several years to complete them successfully.

[8] See Glover and King (2010), King (2014), King and Prince (2015), as well as (Smith et al., 2011, 2012).
[9] This discussion is based on King and Prince (2015).

Sectoral strategies address three (3) main goals simultaneously:

1. Increasing worker skills
2. Improving productivity
3. Enhancing regional competitiveness

Sectoral strategies expanded after 2000 through the work of National Governors Association, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce Aspen's Sectoral Training Academy, and the National Network of Sector Partners, with support from the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Mott, Hitachi, Joyce, and more recently the JP Morgan Chase Foundations. By the late 2000s there were:
1,000+ sector partnerships targeting 20 industries across the country; 39 local WIBs funded by USDOL/ETA; and NGA and its partners were actively working with more than a dozen states on designing and implementing sectoral workforce strategies.

There are two main types of career pathway strategies:

- *Articulated sets of courses/course components* permitting individuals to learn skills and gain postsecondary credentials for specific occupation, e.g., nursing. Pathways identify postsecondary education entry and exit points to jobs with marketable skills and 'stackable' credentials leading to degree completion. They place emphasis on advancing along well-defined postsecondary education/job tracks, with success measured by course advancement, credentials, job retention, and earnings.
- *Occupations with built-in career pathways* that prepare individuals via courses leading to industry-recognized credentials. In this type, the onus is on workers to manage their own career advancement with success measured by job placement in demand occupations, job retention, and earnings.

Career pathways generally:

- Target regional labor markets, often particular sectors. CP strategies aren't all sector based, and not all sector strategies feature CPs. But, CPs are increasingly being integrated into sector strategies.
- Provide frameworks for workforce development, helping to integrate services and resources of community colleges, workforce/social service agencies into structured sequences.
- May offer 3 levels of training—basic skills, entry-level & upgrade training—plus paid internships.
- Often feature occupationally contextualized 'bridge' programs to help raise low-skilled student proficiency for taking credit courses.

The US Department of Health and Human Services is actively supporting career pathway strategies in the healthcare sector through the Health Professions Opportunity Grant (HPOG) program and is further supporting research and evaluations of these efforts as part of its HPOG-University Partnership projects and the national evaluation of the HPOG program implementation and impacts being conducted by Abt Associates and the Urban Institute.

Rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of these strategies is building over time. Studies have shown that participation in three sector strategy pilot programs increased the receipt of employment and training services by some 32 percentage points (Maguire et al., 2010) while youth in the Comprehensive Employment Training program replication had145 more training hours and earned 21 percentage points more credentials than controls (Miller et al. 2005). And, I-BEST participants increased service receipt by 17 percentage points, college credits by 10 points, occupational certifications by 7.5 points three years after random assignment but had no effects on AA degree receipt (Zeidenberg et al 2010).

In terms of labor market outcomes, participation in sector and career pathway strategies has led to increased employment from 2 to 7.5 years post-program and earnings increases of 12-30% over similar time frames, as a result of higher wages, longer job stays and more hours at work. I'll cite one example I'm quite familiar with, the Capital IDEA program in Austin, Texas.

The Ray Marshall Center has been evaluating Capital IDEA for a decade, estimating net impacts on employment, earnings, UI (monetary) eligibility and UI claims, with a quasi-experimental design. We've also conducted Return-on-Investment (ROI) analysis of Capital IDEA participation (Smith et al., 2011 & 2012). Capital IDEA features:

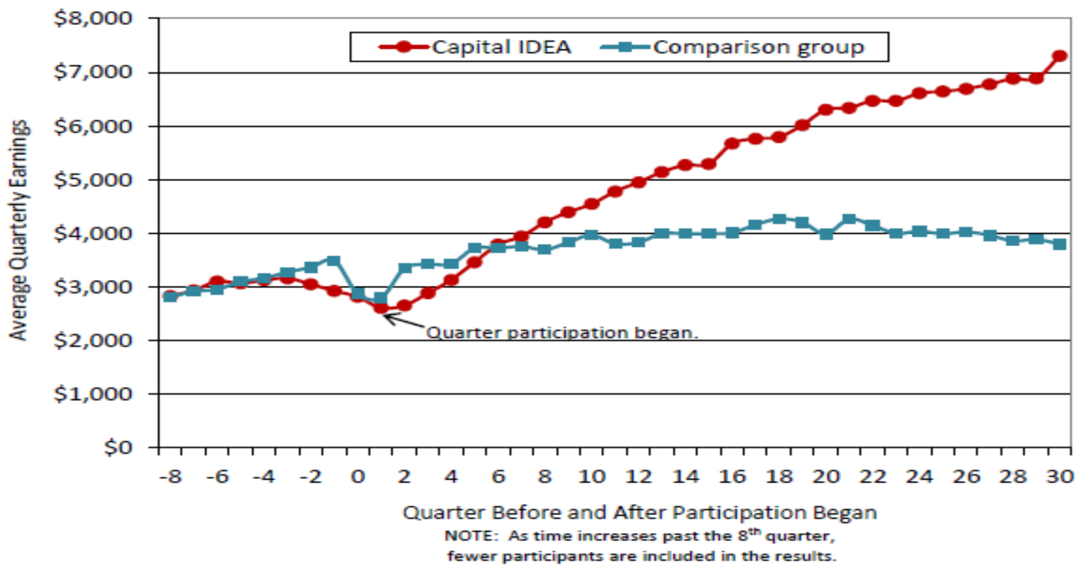
- Longer-term occupational training mostly (75%) in nursing and allied health careers in the healthcare sector, primarily provided via Austin Community College
- Strong employer engagement
- Wrap-around support services (e.g., counseling, college preparation)
- Participation in intensive training and other services while participants continue to work at least part-time, reducing the program's overall costs

Estimated impacts for Capital IDEA participants are *large, lasting and statistically significant*.

- Employment rates for all participants increased by 12.3 points (to 74.3%) over all available quarters after participation, i.e., more than 7 ½ years.
- The share of participants monetarily qualified for UI benefits also increased by 12.3 points.
- Participants enjoyed a $759 advantage in average quarterly earnings over the entire period, or 11.9 points.

The following figure shows the impact of Capital IDEA participation on earnings, computing earnings based on those with and without jobs, so called unconditional earnings. Clearly, these impacts are large, lasting and still growing.

Figure 14. Unconditional Earnings Over Time, Capital IDEA Participants vs. Comparison Group



Source: Smith et al., 2012.

Exploratory ROI analysis for early (2003-2004) Capital IDEA cohorts based on quasi-experimental impacts and program cost data show that over the first 10 years, *each dollar invested in Capital IDEA returns $1.65 to taxpayers, for an annual rate of return (IRR) of 9%.*

As effective as career pathway and sector strategies may be, current TANF policies are generally incompatible with pursuing them and contributing to their use.

Two-Generation Strategies

So called two-generation (2Gen) strategies represent another highly promising avenue to consider for TANF families. Such strategies basically address the needs of parents (including caretakers) and their children simultaneously, seeking to improve their well being and future success through a set of components that may include some or all of the following: quality health and well being, postsecondary education and employment, social capital, asset building and early childhood development.[10] As Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn have written (2014), these 2Gen 2.0 strategies and programs build on earlier efforts in the 1980s and 1990s that were largely targeted to welfare recipients, were less intensive and relied on less effective workforce and postsecondary service delivery models. These strategies are motivated by the fact that there are several important pathways by which parents and home-setting affect children's development, including stress, health, parental education, employment, income, and asset development (Haskins et al., 2014).

[10] More information and resources on 2Gen strategies and programs can be accessed on the Ascend Program at the Aspen Institute website (http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/). In addition, the recent anthology by King, Chase-Lansdale and Small (2015) provides a wide range of 2G materials.

One of the leading examples of these 2G 2.0 efforts is Tulsa's Career*Advance*® Program, an effort I helped design in 2008-2009 and am now helping to evaluate with colleagues at Northwestern University, Columbia, and New York University.[11]

Career*Advance*® is a career pathway program in the healthcare sector funded by the HPOG program at the US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.[12] It has been providing quality training with stackable credentials in a range of healthcare occupations or pathways since 2009-2010 for the parents of children in high-quality Head Start, Early Head Start and Oklahoma early childhood programs delivered by the Community Action Program of Tulsa County. Career coaches support the parents in training that is delivered via a cohort model. Parents have also received financial and in-kind incentives for participation and obtaining credentials.

Evidence on the impacts of Career*Advance*® participation are not yet available; initial impacts for parents and children should be released late this spring. But, early results—in terms of participation, persistence and credentials obtained, as well as interviews and focus groups with partners and parents—are encouraging. For example:

- For Cohorts 4-7, nearly three-fifths (59%) of participants persisted (remained active) In the program at 16 months and 81% of them obtained at least one healthcare credential, figures much higher than most community college and training programs.
- Fully 68% of those parents who stopped out of the program had obtained at least one credential, which would allow them either to take a better job in healthcare in the labor market or to return and continue their training along the career pathway. This was in fact part of the original program design.
- Parents have repeatedly indicated how much they value the opportunity participate and especially having career coaches, a cohort to train with, peer supports, financial assistance and tailored class scheduling. They also clearly recognize they are role modeling for their children despite the added stress of attending classes and related activities.

One important point to make is that many of these parents came to the program having tried to improve their education and skills before, so much so that they had taken on considerable student debt along the way. Some had signed up for training at proprietary schools or other institutions, experienced poorly supported programs and inadequate curriculum but were now unable to try again: student debt acted as a millstone preventing them from re-enrolling for a second chance. These are motivated parents dealing with homelessness, family violence, poor basic skills and other issues in addition to 'bad paper.' Their grit and determination is remarkable. The program has given them the opportunity to try again for themselves and for their children.

Again, TANF policies have made it difficult to enroll many TANF families in this program. Very few parents are actually enrolled in TANF in Oklahoma generally. Moreover, programmatically, workforce, education and social service programs (e.g., TANF, child care) are highly fragmented in Oklahoma making coordination that much more difficult.

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[11] Lindsay Chase-Lansdale is leading the evaluation with support from HPOG-UP, W.K. Kellogg Foundation and others.

[12] Reports detailing the implementation of the program (e.g., Smith et al., 2014) can be found on the Ray Marshall Center website: http://raymarshallcenter.org/.

Labor Market Challenges Facing Poor Families

Before we leave the subject, we must consider the current and projected state of labor market opportunities. This is clearly the environment that poor families must deal with as they struggle to forge a pathway to economic security and stability for themselves and their children.

It's well known that jobs — most jobs but especially well paying ones — now call for at least some postsecondary education and some sort of credential.[13] I say "call for" purposefully, because it's not clear that these jobs all *require* this level of education. But the fact of the matter is that, required or not, employers are increasingly demanding higher levels of education to get and keep these jobs.[14]

In addition, improved data from the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Program have afforded us new insights into how workers actually progress in today's labor markets and which strategies make sense for them to pursue if they want to make real progress over time.[15] It turns out that many of the labor market behaviors and practices that may have worked well in earlier eras no longer apply. If an individual pursues the "get-a-job, any-job" approach but lands and keeps a job with a low-paying employer which does not value or provide much training and which is in a low-demand industry sector, instead of riding the up escalator to career advancement and economic success, s/he will be on the equivalent of the people movers at the airport, moving from one spot to the next on the same level and likely arriving at the next gate to find the flight is delayed or canceled altogether. Better strategies are: 1) to take the time to sort through the potential jobs at the outset and avoid the bad ones altogether in favor of better opportunities — essentially the message of the Portland (OR) site in the NEWWS demonstration[16], and/or 2) if in a bad job/employer/industry, to switch to a better one as quickly as possible. Work-first strategies have never really served mothers on TANF well; in today's labor market environment, they are likely to condemn them to low-wage dead-ends as stressed members of the working poor. This is bad for them. It is equally bad for their children.

Also, new evidence suggests that, while employers play and have played the major role in providing training in the United States, traditionally accounting for as much of 90% of all work-related learning and training in the country, they are backing away from this role.[17] A forthcoming study indicates that employer investments in worker training may have declined by 28% over the 2000s.[18] Moreover, employers have tended to focus their investments disproportionately on mid-to-higher skilled workers, not on those in entry-level positions, very much in keeping with what human capital theory posits.[19]

Recommendations for TANF

There are a number of specific ways TANF could be improved to help poor individuals both prepare for and connect to good jobs offering career advancement opportunities leading to economic success. Among these are a series of recommendations developed by the Ascend Program at the Aspen Institute (to which I contributed). These recommendations include:

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[13] For example, see Carnevale et al. (2010).
[14] See Cappelli (2012).
[15] In particular, see the research by Andersson et al. (2005), Brown et al. (2006) and Holzer et al. (2010), as well as influential work on "job polarization" by Autor and Dorn (2013).
[16] See the discussion in King (2004).
[17] See Lerman (2015).
[18] Waddoups (2016).
[19] Becker (1964).

- Changing TANF work participation to include postsecondary education, adult basic education, ESL and training for high-wage jobs as work activities. This would also include time spent in class, doing homework, etc.
- Revising TANF reporting outcomes to include credential attainment, employment, employment retention and earnings.
- Aligning TANF measurement with WIOA and other programs using common metrics.
- Ensuring that TANF sanctions do not counteract other 2Gen reforms, e.g., reducing the severity of sanctions, ending full-family sanctions, and allowing families enrolled in TANF to retain more child support.

In addition, as noted above, it seems clear that rules governing state expenditures (maintenance-of-effort) are sufficiently loose that states have in some cases displaced or supplanted state spending on related purposes with federal TANF funds. And, many states are now spending a large portion of their federal and state TANF funds on things that seem less closely related to helping families survive and succeed economically. Congress should revisit these rules to ensure these scarce resources are being deployed in the most effective and efficient manner to help families who need them.

Finally, I would encourage the Congress to consider the proposals put forth in the President's FY2017 Budget. Not only does it include funding for 2Gen Demonstrations under TANF and an expansion of the Rural 2Gen Pilots, it also continues support for rigorous research and evaluations of these and other efforts so that we can continuously refine our policies and programs over time to design and implement evidence-based solutions to the challenges we face.

Thank you.

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