



July 26, 2012

An Open Letter to the United States Congress: Support the Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of the 362,000 members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU), I write in support of the “Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act,” introduced by Representatives Camp (R-MI), Kline (R-MN), and Jordan (R-OH) as H.R. 6140 and by Senator Hatch (R-UT) as S. 3397. This important legislation revokes the instructions contained in an “Information Memorandum” issued by Health and Human Services on July 12, which effectively gutted the monumental welfare reforms of 1996 by permitting states to waive the work requirements to receive aid under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program.

The extraordinary action on the part of the Obama Administration in the form of an Executive Order revokes over a decade of profound improvement in federal cash assistance procedures to poor families, on the part of those who are served as well as the institutions involved in providing that assistance. One of the major cornerstones of the 1996 welfare reforms enacted under President Clinton was stricter “workfare” guidelines that encouraged TANF recipients to be more self-reliant, expedited the return of many to the workforce, and removed counterproductive incentives that discouraged seeking full time employment. Put simply, in exchange for assistance, beneficiaries had to go to work, look for work, take classes, or undergo drug and alcohol counseling.

This work-for-welfare reform has had remarkable and lasting outcomes both for welfare recipients and for taxpayers. Since 1996, more than three million families have moved off government assistance. Child poverty has declined, there are more single women in the workforce than before, and their incomes have increased. Even in a bad economy, caseloads are down almost 56 percent over the record highs of the mid 1990s. Overall, welfare reform has seen measurable improvements in employment and earnings for low-income Americans.

By any definition, these statistics make the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act an astounding success. It is thus hard to understand why anyone would want to “fix” what isn’t broken. Rather than undermining the bipartisan reforms of 16 years ago, that model should be expanded to other entitlement programs so that aid recipients and taxpayers alike can reap the rewards.

NTU is pleased to endorse the Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act, and we urge all Members of Congress to co-sponsor it.

Sincerely,

Nan Swift
Federal Affairs Manager