



Washington State National Organization for Women

Economic Equity

Welfare Reform: Reinvesting in the Future

Since the implementation of welfare reform in Washington State under the WorkFirst program caseloads have dropped to a level of 54,000 families, a decline of over 34,000. However, there are several warning signs that changes to the program are needed

- 72% of those currently enrolled in WorkFirst have returned to the program after leaving
- Of those still employed, the average waged has dropped from around nine dollars an hour to eight dollars an hour
- Within the next 18 months families will begin to expire their five-year (life time) limit.

The goal of the Washington's program was to help families move out of poverty "by getting a job and then a better job."

Washington State National Organization for Women (NOW) supports the following changes in the WorkFirst program to address these problems and meet its goal:

- Change the state law to exempt women with children less than one year of age from the work requirements (not the time limits). The current exemption is only up to the age of three months.
- Change the state's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) law to adopt the time limit exemption allowed under Federal statute.
- Change the state law to allow continuation of child only cases when a family has come up on the time limits. These cases may need to be handled through a protected payee program.
- Create a framework through administrative rule that would allow those cooperating with the requirements of the program (such as the over 40% of the case load who are working and grandparents over 55 caring for grand children) to be covered under the extension allowed by federal law (a state can place up to 20% of their entire caseload in this extension option, which allows them to receive benefits AFTER their five year time limit has expired).
- Change the rule for what meets the "work requirements" to include those who are developmentally disabled, or caring for a disable child or relative.
- Allow recipients to work and go to school for up to two years with child care assistance (the current limit is one year with child care) and allow participation in one year of training/education with no additional work requirements.
- Increase the child care reimbursement rate to the 80th percentile based on the 2000 rate survey and limit the child care co-pay to no more than 10% of a families income in the Working Connections child care subsidy program.

- Address the transportation needs of low income workers by expanding subsidies for bus passes, car repairs and car insurance.
- Increase the grant payment to address the toll taken by inflation (the grant has not been increased in almost a decade) and continue the adult dental and vision programs in Medical Assistance and the enrollment of children through the CHIP expansion funds.