

FINAL ISP TANF RECOMMENDATIONS!!

Dear Influencing State Policy Member:

Below are the final ISP recommendations on the reauthorization of the TANF legislation for 2002. Please read and forward them with your own brief letter or email to HHS before Friday, November 30, 2001. Directions and addresses are below.

You should know that: *These ISP recommendations include many, but not every aspect of the TANF legislation; ISP selectively chose several crucial issues of TANF while recognizing there were other important elements that we would be unable to address; **and***

ISP generally supports the TANF Reauthorization Act of 2001, a bill (H.R. 3113) introduced by Rep. Patsy Mink (D-HI), along with many of its provisions to improve the TANF program. Some of ISP's recommendations reinforce similar provisions in H.R. 3113, and some ISP comments are original, not found in the bill, but deemed significant for proposing changes in the legislation next year.

Directions: Send a personal letter on your letterhead to:

Research shows that personalized letters have the greatest impact on politicians.

Wade F. Horn, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary for Children and Families (ACF)
TANF Reauthorization Ideas
Office of Family Assistance-5th Floor East
Aerospace Building
370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW
Washington, DC 20447.

OR: Send an email

Link to the website below and follow instructions on how to register, add a comment, preview and post the message, and receive an acknowledgement page.
GO to: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/HyperNews/get/tanfreat/tanfreat.html>

DIRECTIONS, CON'T: *In your letter's first paragraph, ISP suggests that you briefly identify yourself, your position, your areas of expertise, your affiliations, and/or your experience with TANF. Add to these personal items your own motivation for improving TANF in 2002. Then acknowledge your*

support for the ISP recommendations and paste them into your letter. The sample letter immediately below should serve as a guide:

Dear Assistant Secretary Horn:

RE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Reauthorization of 1996 Welfare Law (TANF)

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen and social worker (student, educator, professional, etc.) regarding the reauthorization of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act (TANF). Currently, I am employed (teach in, study, work, etc.) in a mental health setting (university, agency, office) as a senior clinician (professor, administrator, case manager, etc). My area of expertise is in (child welfare, poverty policy, case management, etc.). I belong to state or national organizations (NASW, NAMI, Child Welfare League, etc.)

Changes in TANF must address the inconsistencies that keep individuals trapped in a cycle of poverty. I also believe that it is imperative that TANF appropriations remain at least at the current level. *Influencing State Policy*, a national social work organization (Go to: www.statepolicy.org), has developed a set of recommendations that I fully support. These recommendations are:

Paste ISP document here...

I hope that your review of the TANF program will include consideration of these proposed changes. If I can assist you in any way, please call me at ().....

Sincerely yours,

***Influencing State Policy's (ISP)
Recommendations for TANF
Reauthorization-2002***

OVERVIEW: The purpose of TANF should be the reduction of poverty in the United States, not merely the reduction of welfare caseloads. Many supporters of welfare reform believe that the nearly 50% drop in welfare caseloads demonstrates the overwhelming success of the reforms. However, it is an

unacceptable fact that only about one-third of all those who leave the welfare rolls have incomes above 150% of the poverty line five years after leaving welfare (Cancian and Meyer, 2000). Only a small fraction of welfare recipients' new jobs pay above-poverty wages and most of the new jobs pay far below the poverty line (Children's Defense Fund and the National Coalition for the Homeless, 1998). Today, 40% of persons living in poverty in the United States are children (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1999).

In order to emphasize a “reduction in poverty” for TANF recipients, *Influencing State Policy (ISP)* proposes changes to the following programmatic aspects: Time Limits; Definition of Work Activity, Education, Training, and Child Care; Barriers: Domestic Violence, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Immigration; The Family Agenda; Charitable Choice; and Upward Mobility.

1. Time Limits: A five year time limit for TANF recipients is acceptable only when the official clock is stopped during the following circumstances (Berlin, 2001; Kaus, 2001; Primus, 2001, Sawhill, 2001):

☞☞ If a welfare recipient is engaged in a work activity including training, education, or caregiving;

☞☞ If a welfare recipient is receiving treatment for work/life barriers such as domestic or sexual violence, mental illness, substance abuse, or disability;

☞☞ If there are periods of pre-specified high unemployment in the region;

☞☞ If a family is on a waiting list for childcare services.

ISP supports prohibiting states from adopting lower time limits than 5 years.

ISP supports removing the 20% cap of the number of families excused from the five year time limit.

2. Definition of Work Activity, Education, Training, and Child Care

ISP recommends an expansion of the TANF “work definition” to include:

- ✍✍ All states should be required to include 2 to 4 year post-secondary education as legitimate eligibility requirements for work activity. This extends the time limits for allowable education and training to 4 years (Corcoran & Loeb, 1999; Wamhoff & Strawn, 2000; Loprest, 1999 & 2001).
- ✍✍ Caring for a child under the age of 6, who is disabled, or who has a serious health condition should legitimately meet the work requirement for TANF (Mink, 2001).

In promoting the expansion of the new definition of work activity (Loprest, 1999 & 2001; NOW Legal Defense Fund, 2001); Sweeney et al., 2000), ISP recommends fiscal rewards and incentive programs should be offered to states that:

- ✍✍ Demonstrate significant increases in welfare recipient enrollment in post-secondary education and training;
- ✍✍ Show significant decreases in child-care waiting lists;
- ✍✍ Train and supply qualified child care providers

3. Barriers to successful TANF participation: Domestic Violence, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Immigration

ISP recommends that all states must:

- ✍✍ Be required to implement mandatory screening and assessment for barriers to TANF participants especially those related to mental health, substance abuse, and domestic and sexual violence (Raphael, 1999).
- ✍✍ Develop and implement a system of referrals for individuals experiencing mental illness, substance abuse problems, or domestic or sexual violence.
- ✍✍ Prohibit employers from discriminating against the hiring of domestic violence victims because of concerns about stalking or harassment at the business establishment (University of Utah, 1996).

Remove restrictions on TANF for qualified immigrants in order to increase uniformity and equity of service provision (Fix & Passel, 1999).

4. The Family Agenda

ISP recommends that TANF policies must help all types of families move out of poverty and must not discriminate against unmarried families in preference to married families. All TANF-eligible families who follow program rules must be given fair and equal access to benefits (Woodside, 2001).

5. Charitable Choice

ISP urges the enforcement of the intent of the charitable choice provision, i.e., to maintain the religious freedom of TANF clients being served. This system of oversight within charitable choice should ensure that:

Services are provided without any requirements for religious observance, that clients cannot be denied services based on their individual religious affiliation, and that no proselytization can be included in the social programs provided (Griener, 2000).

Non-governmental agencies that receive tax-payer dollars do not discriminate in their hiring practices by claiming exemptions under sections 702 and 703 (e)(2) of the Civil Rights Act of 1974.

Staff are trained, competent and qualified to provide social services (Chaves, 1999).

6. Upward Mobility

ISP recommends that TANF funds and/or TANF surplus funds assure upward mobility for the working poor by encouraging: 1) the establishment of Individual Development Accounts (IDA), and 2) the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). IDAs are sheltered savings accounts that can be used to help low-income families save money towards home-ownership, education and training, or

capitalization of a business, and should not be counted as assets when determining eligibility for TANF, Medicaid, or food stamps (Lazere, Fremstad & Goldberg, 2001). TANF funds can be used to establish IDAs and to match individual contributions to IDAs. Using TANF funds to supplement the EITC can make work pay by lifting families out of poverty (Lazere et al, 2001).

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