



March 6, 2007

80th Legislature

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

SB 589, relating to TANF employment programs and participation in those programs by certain parents who are not TANF recipients

My name is Celia Hagert. I am a senior policy analyst for the Center for Public Policy Priorities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB 589. Earlier this year, CPPP proposed a set of reforms designed to help Texas meet the federal work participation rate requirements while improving outcomes for welfare recipients. We believe that SB 589, as it is currently written, assists Texas in achieving both goals.

SB 589 encourages certain nonrecipient parents to work by giving HHSC the ability to provide them with employment and other support services. Under recent changes in federal law, these parents are now included when determining Texas' work participation rate. As such, it is in Texas' best interest to encourage the parents in these families who are able to work to participate in the TANF work program.

SB 589 notably does *not* require these parents to work or subject them and their children to penalties (sanctions) if they fail to meet work rules. We support the decision not to subject these families to the harsh rules and penalties that recipient parents face.

Texas has used the full family sanction as a tool to reduce caseloads, rather than to increase compliance. This policy has had a devastating impact on the TANF program and the vulnerable families and children served by TANF. Approximately 3,500 families, including 8,000 children lose their TANF assistance each month as a result of full family sanctions. Most of these families do not return to the program within 6 months. We urge this committee to reject any effort this session to subject more families to this punitive and detrimental policy.

We firmly believe that Texas can meet the work participation targets established in federal law without forcing vulnerable families off the program. Texas can meet these targets and improve outcomes for TANF families by pursuing policies that increase the proportion of TANF recipients who are working, reduce recidivism by supporting families after they enter the workforce, and ensure ongoing assistance to families who face the greatest barriers to employment. We urge you to support SB 589 and similar policies designed to help Texas meet the federal work participation rate requirements while improving outcomes for welfare recipients.

The charts on the following page illustrate the impact of Texas' welfare reform policies on poor children and families.

Figure 1. Impact of welfare reform on TANF caseloads:

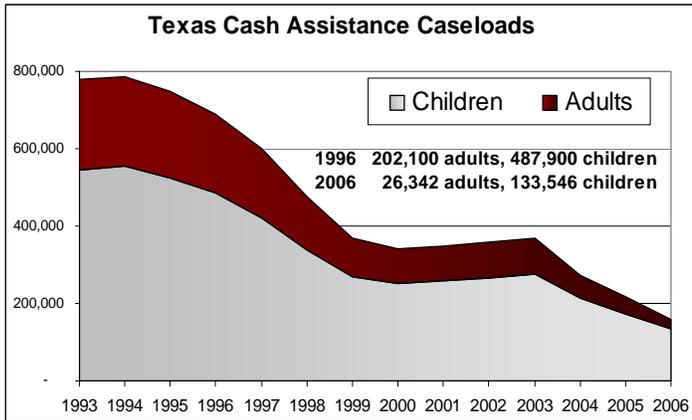


Figure 2. Impact of full-family sanction policy on caseloads

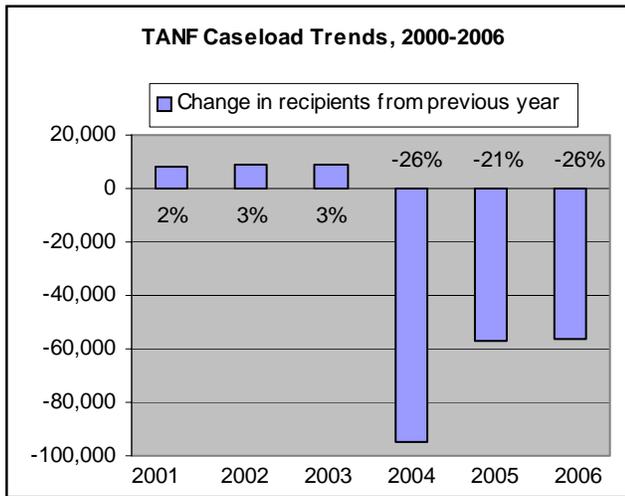


Figure 3. Share of poor children in Texas who receive TANF

