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## Welfare bills begin to move

The 75th Legislative Session follows the trend of the past several sessions in seeing a wide array of welfare “reform” proposals. From very punitive measures to positive efforts, more than thirty bills are being monitored by CPPP staff this session. In addition to the bills addressed in this *Policy Page*, dozens of other bills dealing with child care and general health and human services policy are also beginning to be heard in House and Senate Committees. Future *Policy Pages* will summarize those proposals.

Welfare and workforce reform bills this session play out against two key issues. The first is the fact that Texas entered this session with a projection of nearly \$600 million in surplus TANF funds by the end of the coming biennium (see [www.cppp.org/products/reports/securing.html](http://www.cppp.org/products/reports/securing.html) for more details). This unprecedented windfall in federal funds targeted to low-income families has offered a unique opportunity for legislators to introduce legislation that would use these funds for an array of initiatives. The other background issue is that in March of 2002 the federal waiver under which Texas operates several key elements of its welfare reform plan expires.

This has spurred policymakers to explore changes which may need to be made between now and then to come into full compliance with provisions of the federal welfare law that became effective August 22, 1996. Added to this mix was a campaign by the governor which featured several welfare reform proposals – both positive and negative.

The Center is closely monitoring all welfare reform legislation and has already testified on several bills. In coming weeks we will keep you informed of the progress of the bills listed below and provide access to our analyses, talking points and testimony as the bills reach various stages of the legislative process. Committee hearings are the one clear opportunity for public input. If you have an opinion about the bills listed below, now is the time to contact your legislator and those who will be hearing the legislation in committee. We also encourage you to provide public testimony (written or oral) or to register your position – for or against – when the bills are heard in committee. The full text of the bills can be accessed on the Internet at [www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlo/billsrch/textsrch.htm](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlo/billsrch/textsrch.htm).

### BILLS ON THE MOVE

Two Senate Bills have already been heard in the Senate Health Services Committee and are headed for possible debate on the Senate floor. Contact all Senators and yours in particular if you wish to express your opinion before these bills are debated and voted on by the full Senate.

#### CSSB 51 - BY NELSON

*Relating to prohibiting persons convicted of certain drug-related offenses from receiving TANF benefits.*

This bill would permanently deny TANF benefits to a person convicted of a drug related felony. Many states have either opted out of this federal provision or modified it to exempt certain persons (e.g. those who have completed or are participating in a drug treatment program) and/or have implemented a temporary denial period such as one year, instead of a lifetime ban.

See posted testimony and memo to Senate Committee members at:

[www.cppp.org/products/testimony/testimony/tsttanfdrugs.htm](http://www.cppp.org/products/testimony/testimony/tsttanfdrugs.htm) and [www.cppp.org/products/policyanalysis/memeccsb51.html](http://www.cppp.org/products/policyanalysis/memeccsb51.html).

#### SB 64 - BY NELSON

(Companion: HB 1430 by Christian)

*Relating to TANF and Medicaid benefits for additional children born to TANF recipients.*

This bill would deny cash benefits to a child born into a family already receiving TANF. Known as the “family cap” this controversial policy was rejected each of the last two legislative sessions. See posted testimony at: [www.cppp.org/products/testimony/testimony/tstfamilycap.html](http://www.cppp.org/products/testimony/testimony/tstfamilycap.html)

**On Tuesday March 30th at 2:00pm in Room E2.028 the House Human Services Committee will meet to consider and take public testimony on the following welfare related bills:**

#### HB 73 - BY SOLOMONS

*Relating to screening for criminal history and drug use of applicants for public assistance benefits by health and human services agencies.*

HB 503 - BY TILLERY

*Relating to the consideration of the income earned by certain recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits for eligibility determination purposes.*

Texas ranks last in the country in the treatment of the earnings of welfare recipients who begin to earn income. Changing the state's earnings disregard policy to support the transition from welfare to work is a CPPP priority and an excellent use of surplus TANF funds. See "Beyond Welfare": [www.cppp.org/products/reports/beyondwelfare.html](http://www.cppp.org/products/reports/beyondwelfare.html).

HB 1061 - BY MAXEY

*Relating to abolishing the electronic imaging program of the Texas Department of Human Services.*

HB 1430 - BY CHRISTIAN

(Companion: SB 64 by Nelson)

"Family Cap" see comments above)

*Relating to TANF and Medicaid benefits for additional children born to TANF recipients.*

HB 1936 - BY CHRISTIAN

(same as CSSB 51 by Carona - see below)

*Relating to prohibiting persons convicted of certain drug-related offenses from receiving TANF benefits.*

HB 2702 - BY CHAVEZ

*Relating to nutritional assistance for certain legal immigrants*

ALSO BEING HEARD IN THE MARCH  
30TH HOUSE HUMAN SERVICES  
COMMITTEE MEETING

Ensuring Eligible Children Continue to Receive Medicaid

HB 820 - BY NAISHTAT

*Relating to review of certain children's continued eligibility for medical assistance.*

This bill directs TDHS to adopt policies to try to stop the decline in children's Medicaid enrollment associated with state and federal welfare "reform."

Nutrition Assistance for Legal Immigrants

HB 2702

CHAVEZ/COLEMAN/NAISHTAT

Provides replacement food assistance benefits to legal immigrant children, seniors, and persons with disabilities who were unfairly penalized by the Food Stamp cuts under federal welfare reform. HB 2702 would provide benefits to roughly 7,300 legal immigrants.

Other non-welfare bills: HB 2291, HB 2170, HB 3321, HB 3322

**On Wednesday March 31st at 8:30 am in the Senate Chamber the Senate Committee on Human Services will consider and take public testimony on:**

SB 1158 - BY CARONA

(Companion: HB 3102 by Truitt)

*Relating to fraudulent conduct with respect to TANF benefits.*

This bill would permanently deny TANF benefits to anyone committing intentional welfare fraud regardless of the scale of the infraction.

SB 1159 - BY CARONA

*Relating to compliance with certain requirements of the responsibility agreement by recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits.*

This bill would impose a full family sanction (remove all cash assistance) on TANF clients who do not comply with work requirements or do not cooperate with child support enforcement efforts. Currently, the state removes the caretaker from assistance for these infractions which generally cuts the benefits in half.

OTHER WELFARE RELATED BILLS THE CENTER IS TRACKING

HB 875 - BY MAXEY

*Relating to increasing collections for fraud in the Medicaid, financial assistance, and Food Stamp programs.*

HB 990 - BY DUTTON

*Relating to administrative procedures and criminal convictions for welfare fraud.*

HB 1407 - BY COLEMAN

*Relating to the creation of the self-sufficiency fund to develop job training for certain recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.*

This fund already exists at TWC. It was created last session using TANF funds. The training provided by this funding is designed to help a person earn enough to become independent of public assistance. This bill codifies the existing program.

HB 1967 - BY VAN DE PUTTE

*Relating to an exclusion from unemployment compensation chargebacks for employers who hire certain recipients of public assistance.*

HB 2002 - BY LEWIS

(Companion: SB 666 by Zaffirini)

*Relating to exemptions from work or employment activity participation requirements for certain TANF recipients.*

HB 2017 - BY CHRISTIAN

*Relating to the designation of certain state employees as liaisons to faith-based organizations for the purpose of promoting community services for the needy.*

HB 2564 - BY LEWIS

*Relating to the consideration of child support for purposes of determining eligibility for benefits under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program.*

HB 2604 - BY SOLOMONS

*Relating to screening for criminal history of applicants for certain financial assistance.*

HB 2940 - BY LEWIS

*Relating to exemptions from work or employment activity participation requirements for certain recipients under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.*

HB 3102 - BY TRUITT

(Companion: SB 1158 by Carona)

*Relating to fraudulent conduct with respect to TANF benefits.*

HB 3470 - BY OLIVO

*Relating to the creation of a Parents as Scholars pilot program for certain persons eligible to receive TANF benefits.*

HB 3524 - BY NORIEGA

*Relating to providing supplemental financial assistance and services to certain grandparents.*

HB 3639 - BY NAISHTAT

*Relating to eligibility for and the provision of services and programs for needy people and to the duty of parents to*

*support their children to prevent reliance on programs for needy people; providing penalties.*

This bill will likely be the framework for an omnibus welfare bill out of the House Human Services Committee. It is likely to change substantially from this original draft.

SB 12 - BY ZAFFIRINI

*Relating to the creation of the welfare reform legislative oversight committee.*

SB 13 - BY ZAFFIRINI

*Relating to the consideration of income earned by certain recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families for eligibility determination purposes.* (see comments on HB 503 above)

SB 343 - BY ELLIS

*Relating to the creation of the self-sufficiency fund to develop job training for certain recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.* See comments on HB 1407 above)

SB 666 - BY ZAFFIRINI

(Companion: HB 2002 by Lewis)

*Relating to exemptions from work or employment activity participation requirements for certain TANF recipients.*

SB 1425 - BY WEST

*Relating to a tax credit for wages paid to certain employees who are recipients of temporary assistance for needy families.*

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