☆ WASHINGTON WATCH ☆

An update on federal action from

The Center for Public Policy Priorities

900 Lydia Street • Austin, Texas 78702 • 512-320-0222 voice • 512-320-0227 fax

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Due to the importance of this issue, this special issue of Washington Watch *is being sent to many people and groups for the first time. If you are interested in more information about current Congressional welfare reform proposals or about the Center's* Washington Watch *series, call 512-320-0222.*

Your Congressperson Needs Support in Voting NO on the Welfare Reform Bill

Why the Urgency*?*

Both houses of Congress recently passed separate bills to reform the nation's welfare and social services programs. Since then, the House and Senate have been working to produce a compromise "conference" bill. When an agreement over whether or not to convert child nutrition programs (e.g. school lunch) into a block grant is reached, the bill will be sent to both houses for final approval (a House vote may be Dec. 14th or 15th), and on to the President. Organizations and others who care about the needs of the poor are concerned that many members of Congress may vote for this welfare reform bill in the **mistaken belief** that it is dramatically better than the original House bill, and that it limits damage to poor families. **In fact, the White House estimates that at least 1.5 million more children will be pushed into poverty by this welfare bill.**

Contact your Congressperson today and tell them to oppose this abandonment of the safety net for poor children

Key Highlights of the Shortcomings of the Conference Welfare Reform Bill (a.k.a. H.R. 4)

❖ The bill **cuts almost $80 billion** in essential help for children and families. More than 90% of this cut comes from programs other than cash welfare, including food stamps, child protective services, and assistance to disabled children.

❖ The bill is **weak on work**. Even the Contract with America called for billions more to be spent on work programs for welfare recipients, but this bill includes stringent work requirements without providing any new funding for job training.

❖ **Strict time limits** in the bill would end cash assistance after five years **whether or not a job was available, and even if the state had never offered the family head job training**. Also, states' ability to exempt some families from the time limits for hardship reasons has been further restricted.

❖ Though they will need resources for child care and job training more than ever, **states would be allowed to reduce their current funding for basic assistance** below 1994 levels by more than $17 billion over the next five years.

❖ **Two-thirds of children eligible for SSI under current law** would either have their **benefits substantially reduced or removed entirely**.

❖ The bill **seriously jeopardizes services for abused and neglected children** by under-funding services and administration to respond to reports of abuse and neglect, place children in adoptive and foster homes, and train new foster parents.

❖ The bill **cuts the food stamp program by $34 billion** by cutting benefits to needy families and restricting who can receive food stamps. The bill also **allows Texas to convert its food stamp program to a block grant which would never grow at all**.

❖ Rather than being "flexible", the bill **requires states to deny assistance to children born into families already on AFDC** (the "family cap") unless the state legislature specifically votes against this provision.

❖ **Legal immigrants are** barred from receiving food stamps and SSI, and **all new legal immigrants would be barred from receiving federally funded, means-tested benefits** (e.g., Medicaid and AFDC) **for five years** after they arrive.

❖ The bill also **eliminates guaranteed Medicaid coverage for families on welfare, but ties states hands so that they cannot reduce red tape related to Medicaid eligibility for those people.**

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