



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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For Immediate Release

Wednesday, Feb. 1, 2006

Grassley Addresses Concerns About Work Standard for Two-parent Families

WASHINGTON – Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Committee on Finance, has responded to concerns raised by two of his fellow senators regarding the work standard for two-parent families in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families provision in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. The text of Grassley’s letter to his colleagues follows. His colleagues’ original letter is attached.

January 31, 2006

The Honorable Barack Obama
United States Senator
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Evan Bayh
United States Senator
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Obama and Bayh:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provision relating to the participation standard for two-parent families in S. 1932, The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA). I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

Under current law, single parents receiving assistance, with a child younger than six, must engage in work or work-related activities for at least 20 hours per week, and single parents with a child over six must engage in work or work-related activities for at least 30 hours a week. Parents in two-parent families must engage in activities for 35 hours per week, or 55 hours per week if they receive federally funded child care, but the parents can share the work hours. This means that the hour standard per adult in a two-parent household is actually less than single parents with a child over the age of six years.

It is reasonable for two able-bodied adults to engage in work or work-related activities on a part-time basis. In fact, the bipartisan PRIDE bill reported out of the Senate Finance Committee actually increases the standard hour for two-parent families who are not receiving child care assistance from 35 to 39 hours. By contrast, the DRA does not increase the standard hour requirement for single- or two-parent families.

Additionally, under current law, states are required to meet a minimum work participation

rate of 50 percent for all families and a 90 percent rate for two-parent families. The DRA merely extends this standard to a state's separate welfare program. The Congressional Budget Office has concluded that a principal means by which states will avoid having to engage clients in meaningful work, education or work preparedness activities is to simply transfer these cases into a separate state program. It is not in the best interest for these families to permit states to allow these families to languish on welfare, thus fostering a vicious cycle of deep and persistent poverty and a culture that does not value work.

The positive effect that work and marriage have on the ability of families to transition from dependence to self-sufficiency is not adversely affected by a separate work standard for two-parent families. I am not aware of any data, research or studies that have developed any causal link between a separate work standard for two-parent families receiving assistance and the dissolution of marriages or a reason why couples who were to be married would choose to do otherwise.

The improved TANF work requirements in the DRA, combined with the new healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood funding also provided in the legislation, will result in improved social and economic conditions for children.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Grassley
Chairman