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**Welfare-Vocational Education**

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# AAUW MEMO

**DATE:** June 6, 1997

**TO:** Elena Kagan, Deputy Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy  
 Cynthia Rice, Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy

**FROM:** Nancy Zirkin, Director of Government Relations, 785-7720  
 Cindy Brown, Senior Legislative Associate, 785-7730

**SUBJECT:** Welfare reform mark-up

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The American Association of University Women (AAUW) is pleased that the Clinton Administration is carrying out its commitment to improve the welfare law that was enacted last summer. AAUW expressly urges the Administration to take a stronger stand on two issues in the welfare reconciliation – vocational educational training and workplace protections.

**Vocational Educational Training:** Current law caps the number of participants in vocational educational training at 20 percent of the entire welfare caseload for each state. This cap includes teenage parents who are completing high school or a GED program. However, the Ways and Means Committee proposal, as approved by the Subcommittee on Human Resources, states that the cap will be 30 percent of those required to participate in a work activity for each fiscal year, including teen parents. We strongly urge that the Administration support the current law and oppose the Ways and Means language.

If the Ways and Means Committee provision is adopted, teen parents will comprise the total exception and no adult recipients will be able to participate in vocational education training. This will be particularly harmful to women who are 97 percent of adult welfare recipients.

States must have flexibility to provide vocational education training where appropriate. Numerous studies have found that welfare recipients that participate in vocational training earn higher wages than those who do not, thereby reducing welfare dependency and recidivism. For example, Iowa program data show that participants who completed vocational educational training had starting wages 25% higher than those in job search. Further nearly half of those who completed post-secondary education or training (48 percent) never returned to welfare over the next five years, compared to just 31 percent of those in job search. If the true goal of welfare reform is to move families permanently into the workforce and out of poverty, then states must have the option of providing vocational educational training.

**Workfare Employment Protections:** We urge the Administration to strongly oppose the workfare provisions included in the Ways and Means proposal which would specifically exclude workfare participants from being defined as "employees." This provision would deprive poor workers, predominately women and minorities, of basic workplace protections and rights enjoyed by other workers including:

- A guaranteed minimum wage
- Protections under civil rights laws and the Equal Pay Act
- Protection of sexual harassment and other on-the-job exploitation
- Opportunities to accumulate leave to use when their children are sick
- Protections from unsafe working conditions and the right to protective equipment

Women must have these protections to succeed in the workplace and move permanently from welfare to work.

AAUW 6/6/97