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Welfare Reauthorization: An Overview of the Issues

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Welfare Reauthorization Legislation

Trends Under Welfare Reform

Funding the TANF and Child Care Block Grants

TANF Work Requirements

 Current Law Work Participation Standard

 Welfare Reauthorization Revisions to TANF Work Participation Standards

Child Support Enforcement, Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives,
Abstinence Education, and Marriage Promotion

 Child Support Enforcement

 Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives

 Abstinence Education

 Marriage Promotion

CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS, REPORTS, AND DOCUMENTS

FOR ADDITIONAL READING

Welfare Reauthorization: An Overview of the Issues

SUMMARY

The conference agreement on the spending budget reconciliation bill (S. 1932) includes a scaled-back version of welfare reauthorization legislation. The agreement would extend the basic Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant at current funding levels through FY2010; increase the share of TANF families required to participate in work activities; increase child care funding from current levels by \$200 million per year (\$1 billion over five years, FY2006-FY2010); provide federal cost-sharing for child support passed through to TANF and former TANF families; provide up to \$100 million per year in demonstration grants for the promotion of “healthy marriages”; and establish \$50 million per year for “responsible fatherhood” initiatives.

Excluded from the conference agreement on S. 1932 is a provision in the House-passed version of the budget reconciliation bill that would have reduced the federal matching rate for child support enforcement programs, though the agreement does prevent federal matching of child support incentive payments reinvested in the program.

If enacted, the agreement would end a four-year saga of legislative attempts to reauthorize TANF and related programs. Since October 1, 2002, the program has operated under a series of “temporary extension” measures.

In 2004, 12.5 million children lived in families with incomes below the poverty line (a 17.3% child poverty rate). Research has shown that poverty can have negative consequences on a child’s development. Children depend upon their parents for support, and most of the recent policy attention has focused on initiatives to move poor parents (mostly

single mothers) from welfare to work and on reducing welfare dependency.

Following enactment of the 1996 welfare law, the cash welfare caseload fell from 4.8 million families in 1995 to 2.2 million in 2004, employment of single mothers has increased substantially, and child poverty rates have fallen. However, many families who leave the welfare rolls remain poor. Out-of-wedlock birth rates and children living in single-parent families remain at historical highs.

In February 2002, the Administration proposed its welfare reauthorization plan. The debate was dominated by controversy over the amount of child care funding and the Administration’s proposed changes to TANF work participation standards. The final agreement reflects the same child care funding increase that was provided in House-passed welfare reauthorization measures in 2002 and 2003 (\$1 billion in additional mandatory child care funding over five years). The 2005 Senate Finance Committee welfare reauthorization bill (S. 667) would have provided \$6 billion in additional child care funding over five years. Though the final agreement would require states to increase the share of their families participating in TANF work activities, it does not include the Administration’s proposal to set a 40-hour workweek standard or revise the activities that count toward the standard.

The reauthorization debate also reflected a renewed focus on noncustodial parents (usually fathers) and on family formation issues. The budget agreement includes responsible fatherhood initiatives and a scaled-back version of the President’s initiative to promote healthy marriages.

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

On December 21, 2005, the Senate passed S. 1932, the budget spending reconciliation bill, which includes a scaled-back version of welfare reform reauthorization. The bill extends funding for the basic TANF block grant through FY2010, increases the percentage of TANF families that would be required to participate in work or work activities, revises child support enforcement, and establishes healthy marriage promotion grants and responsible fatherhood initiatives. It also provides for a one-year extension of the abstinence education and Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA) programs.

The House approved the conference agreement on S. 1932 in the early-morning hours of December 19, 2005. However, despite passing the conference agreement, the Senate stripped three provisions (unrelated to welfare reform) from the bill because they were found to run afoul of Senate rules regarding budget reconciliation. Therefore, the House must take up the revised version of the measure. With the current funding and authority for TANF and related programs set to expire on December 31, 2005, Congress approved another in a series of temporary extension bills (H.R. 4635). This bill would extend TANF and related programs through March 31, 2006.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

In 2004, there were 12.5 million children living in families with incomes below the poverty line (17.3% of all children in families). Children are dependent upon their parents for economic support, and much of the focus of policy for poor and low-income families with children has been on welfare reform initiatives to move parents (mostly single mothers) from welfare to work through requiring and rewarding work and reducing welfare dependency.

A number of well-known factors increase the risk of a child being in poverty, such as being in a family headed by a single mother, without a worker, and in which the breadwinners have low educational attainment. Children who are African-American or Hispanic are more at risk than white children to be in poverty. Research has also shown that poverty has negative consequences on a child's development, which could affect the child's life chances as an adult.

The 109th Congress is reviewing a number of programs that aid poor and low-income families with children. These programs include the TANF and child care block grants, child support enforcement, abstinence education, transitional Medicaid (known as Transitional Medical Assistance), Head Start, and the Workforce Investment Act. Other potential policy initiatives, such as social security and tax reform, also would likely affect low-income families with children. This brief focuses on programs and policy initiatives that are being raised in the context of reviewing and reauthorizing welfare programs: TANF, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Child Support Enforcement, Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA), Abstinence Education, initiatives to promote responsible fatherhood, and initiatives to promote rearing children in married-couple families.

Welfare Reauthorization Legislation

The original funding authority for TANF, mandatory child care, and state grants for abstinence education provided in the 1996 welfare law expired at the end of FY2002 (September 30, 2002). President Bush submitted his welfare reauthorization proposals to Congress in February 2002. Though Congress debated welfare legislation throughout the three years 2002 through 2004, no final action was taken on a long-term reauthorization. While reauthorization legislation remained stalled, Congress passed measures to provide stop-gap funding for the welfare programs. Under current law, the funding authority for these programs is set to expire December 31, 2005.

Early in the 109th Congress, the Senate Finance Committee approved a welfare reauthorization measure (S. 667), but it has yet to be considered by the full Senate. The House Republican leadership introduced its welfare reauthorization bill (H.R. 240), which closely tracks the President's 2002 reauthorization proposal. The House-passed version of the budget reconciliation bill included the reauthorization proposals contained in H.R. 240, plus some additional provisions to reduce outlays in TANF-related programs.

Trends Under Welfare Reform

The 1996 welfare reform law (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, P.L. 104-193) was a major piece of social legislation, most known for ending the cash welfare entitlement for needy families with children, creating the TANF block grant, setting a five-year time limit on aid, and requiring more work from welfare recipients. The law also restructured child care programs, combining programs for cash assistance recipients and other working poor families; modified the Child Support Enforcement program; restricted eligibility for noncitizens in various welfare programs; restricted eligibility for disabled children in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program; and made changes to the Food Stamp program.

The goals of welfare reform include reducing welfare dependency through work, job preparation and marriage; reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and promoting the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. TANF gives states a great deal of latitude in designing their programs, resulting in each state having a different program with a different story to tell. In their TANF-funded cash welfare programs, many states tightened work rules, requiring applicants to search for work even before being certified eligible for aid. Most states adopted tougher penalties on families where a member refused to comply with work requirements. However, states also adopted features that liberalized eligibility, particularly for families where recipients went to work once on the rolls. For example, in most states families are allowed to keep more of their welfare benefits as their earnings increase, have a car, and accumulate more assets. Spending on child care has increased.

Table 1 shows various social and economic indicators for the post-welfare reform period. The period following welfare reform saw the cash welfare caseload plummet and child poverty rates drop to levels not seen since the 1970s. Employment of single mothers increased dramatically. Progress was more muted, or could be less tied to changes in policy, on a number of other fronts. The rate at which teenagers became pregnant declined, but that

was a continuation of a trend that became evident before the mid-1990s. The percent of children born out-of-wedlock continued to increase, though at a rate slower than during previous periods. Further, much of the progress occurred during the period 1995 to 2000. In 2001, the economy entered a recession. Since then, national caseloads have generally held steady (some states saw increases; others decreases). Employment of single mothers has been down from its historical high in 2000. The number of children living in families headed by a married couple decreased slightly from 2000 to 2003. Child poverty rates increased again from 2000 to 2004.

Welfare dependency has been viewed as both a result of and a cause of chronic poverty. Welfare caseloads and child poverty simultaneously declined during the late 1990s. However, the welfare caseload declined faster than child poverty, meaning that cash welfare touches a smaller share of the poor than it did before welfare reform. Further, despite the decline in welfare dependency, children are still more likely to be poor than the elderly and nonaged adults, and out-of-wedlock births and single parenthood remain at historical highs despite the halving of the cash welfare caseload.

Table 1. Economic and Social Indicators, Selected Years

	1995	2000	2004	Change (for rates, percentage point change is shown)	
				1995-2000	2000-2004
Cash welfare					
Cash welfare caseload (monthly average, millions of families)	4.8	2.3	2.2	-2.5	-0.1
Cash assistance spending (federal and state, billions of \$, fiscal years)	\$21.9	\$11.2	\$10.4	-\$10.7	-\$0.8
Child poverty					
Child poverty rates	20.2%	15.6%	17.3%	-4.6	1.7
Related children in poverty (millions)	14.0	11.0	12.5	-3.0	1.5
Employment of single mothers					
Percent of single mothers employed	64.0%	75.5%	72.0%	11.6	-3.5
Percent of single mothers with a child under age 6 employed.	52.5%	69.1%	63.8%	16.6	-5.3
General Economic Indicators					
Unemployment rate	5.6%	4.0%	5.5%	-5.6	1.5
Employment (total nonfarm payrolls, in millions)	117.3	131.8	131.5	14.5	-0.3
	1995	2000	2003	Change (for rates, percentage point change is shown)	
				1995-2000	2000-2003
Percent of children born out-of-wedlock	32.2%	33.2%	34.6%	1.0	1.4
Teen pregnancy rate (per 1,000 female teens aged 15-19)	56.0	47.7	41.7	-8.3	-6.0
Percent of children living in married couple families (March of each year)	72.9%	72.9%	71.8%	0.0	-1.1

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS).

Funding the TANF and Child Care Block Grants

The 1996 welfare law converted and consolidated several federal-state matching grant programs into the TANF and child care block grants. Most TANF funding is provided in a fixed, basic annual grant of \$16.5 billion (50 states and D.C). This amount represents the peak federal contribution made to pre-TANF programs in the mid-1990s. The basic block grant is fixed; it neither increases nor decreases with changes in the cash assistance caseload. Moreover, it is not adjusted for inflation. The child care block grant has two major parts: (1) discretionary funding, which is determined in annual appropriations; and (2) mandatory funding, with appropriations found in the 1996 welfare reform law. The 1996 law included gradual increases in mandatory child care funding. Total child care funding has been essentially flat since FY2002.

Table 2 compares the TANF, child care, and Transitional Medicaid funding proposals included in the conference agreement on the budget reconciliation bill with the House-passed reconciliation measure, and S. 667 as reported from the Senate Finance Committee. (For a discussion of Transitional Medicaid, see CRS Report RL31698, *Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA) Under Medicaid*, by April Grady.) Note that while the basic TANF block grant would be extended (at current funding levels) until FY2010 under the conference agreement on the budget reconciliation bill, TANF supplemental grants would be extended for only three years and TMA only one year. Further, previous welfare reauthorization proposals had included \$200 million per year in grants for healthy marriage promotion — \$100 million per year for matching grants to states and tribes and a second \$100 million per year in research and demonstration funding controlled by the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS). The conference agreement scaled back funding for healthy marriage promotion to \$100 million in research and demonstration funding. An additional \$50 million in mandatory funding would be for responsible fatherhood initiatives. All existing TANF bonuses — a High Performance Bonus based on states’ progress toward meeting the block grant’s goals (\$200 million per year) and a bonus for reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancies (\$100 million per year) — are eliminated.

Table 2. Summary of Funding Provisions

	House-Passed Budget Reconciliation Bill	S. 667 (as reported by the Senate Finance Committee, S.Rept. 109-51)	Conference agreement on the Budget Reconciliation Bill
Basic TANF block grant	Extend basic TANF block grant through FY10 at current levels (\$16.5 billion per year).	Same as the House-passed budget reconciliation bill.	Same.
Supplemental TANF grants	Extend supplemental grants at \$319 million per year through FY09 only.	Same as House reconciliation bill.	Extend supplemental grants only through FY08.

	House-Passed Budget Reconciliation Bill	S. 667 (as reported by the Senate Finance Committee, S.Rept. 109-51)	Conference agreement on the Budget Reconciliation Bill
Marriage promotion grants	Fund \$200 million per year in marriage promotion grants. Reduce TANF bonuses from \$300 million per year to \$100 million per year.	Same as House reconciliation bill. (Note: TANF bonuses are further reduced to pay for responsible fatherhood grants.)	Up to \$100 million per year in marriage promotion grants. (Another \$50 million per year is set aside for responsible fatherhood initiatives.) All TANF bonuses (\$300 million eliminated).
Mandatory child care funding.	Provide an additional \$0.5 billion over five years (FY2006-FY2010)	Provide an additional \$6 billion over five years (FY2006-FY2010). The cost is partially offset by changes to the earned income tax credit (EITC) and child tax credit.	Provide an additional \$1 billion over five years (FY2006-FY2010).
Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA)	No provision.	Extend 12-month TMA for five years and allow states to waive reporting requirements. FY2005-FY2010 cost: \$4.2 billion.	Extend 12-month TMA for one year (through Dec. 31, 2006).

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS).

The level of mandatory child care funding has been a contentious point of debate over the past four years. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that to maintain the current level of child care subsidies over the next five years — maintain current child care caseloads and average subsidy levels *and* keep pace with inflation — a total of \$4.8 billion in extra federal or state funds would be needed. The current child care caseload includes families on the cash welfare rolls, as well as other low-income, working families. In FY2001, only one in five families aided by the child care block grant received TANF cash assistance — the other four families were either former TANF families (in the transition from welfare to work) or were working poor families without a connection to the cash welfare program.

The conference agreement ultimately included an increase of \$200 million per year (from \$2.717 billion to \$2.917 billion per year) in mandatory child care funding, or a total increase of \$1 billion over five years. The proposed increase reflects twice that proposed earlier in the House-passed budget reconciliation bill (\$0.5 billion), mirroring the funding level passed by the House in welfare reauthorization measures of both 2002 and 2003. The \$1 billion increase stands in contrast to the proposed increase of \$6 billion over five years included in the bill reported out of the Senate Finance Committee early in 2005 (S. 667).

The conference agreement's \$1 billion in additional federal child care funds would require state matching. This "leverages" some additional state dollars for each new federal child care dollar. If states drew down the full \$1 billion, approximately \$0.8 billion in state

child care funds would also be expended, bringing the total new federal and state spending for the child care block grant to about \$1.8 billion.

However, the \$1.8 billion in total new federal and state child care funds would be insufficient to maintain current caseloads and average child care subsidies, and to keep pace with inflation. In addition, the conference agreement has TANF work provisions (see below) that, beginning in FY2007, are likely to substantially increase the share of TANF families that would be required to work or participate in job readiness activities. This, too, is likely to increase the demand for child care subsidies.

The child care and TANF block grants do not entitle families to child care subsidies. Therefore, states could respond in a number of different ways (or combination of ways) to inflationary pressures and the likely increase in the demand for child care subsidies caused by stricter TANF work participation requirements:

- **Increase funding from other sources, particularly TANF.** TANF has been a major contributor of child care funds, the second-largest spending category next to cash assistance within TANF. States could allocate more TANF spending to child care. However, a number of factors are likely to limit TANF's ability to contribute more child care funds, specifically: (1) the block grant will remain frozen at the same levels as it was in FY1997 (\$16.5 billion) and inflation continues to erode the purchasing power of those dollars; and (2) the conference agreement would have the likely effect of increasing the percentage of TANF families that would have to participate in work activities, increasing the TANF work costs in addition to child care costs.
- **Targeting more child care dollars to families receiving cash assistance.** As discussed above, in FY2001 only one in five families receiving subsidies under the child care block grant received cash assistance. To meet the higher child care costs due to the increase in TANF work participation standards, states could target more child care dollars to families on TANF assistance, reducing spending on subsidies for other low-income ("working poor") families.
- **Restructuring child care subsidies to reduce their average costs.** Under both block grants, states determine subsidy levels and how much a family has to contribute from their own income (co-payments). These rules can be restructured to reduce the average child care subsidy per family.

TANF Work Requirements

TANF requires states to run "mandatory" work and job preparation programs, setting participation requirements and sanctioning families (reducing or ending benefits) that do not comply with them. Mandatory participation requirements can help achieve a number of different policy objectives, including:

- Enforcing the notion that recipients are obligated to support their families through work; that is, they must "do something" in exchange for their benefits;

- Having recipients engage in activities that will enhance their ability to compete in the labor market and ultimately leave welfare for work; and
- Deterring those who have other means of support (e.g., those already working but not reporting income to the welfare office or participating in the underground economy) from applying and receiving benefits.

Most states have generally adopted a “work-first” approach to implementing their programs, emphasizing rapid entry into the labor force through up-front job search. Evaluations of such programs indicate that they do increase employment and reduce welfare receipt. However, these programs have generally not been found to raise the incomes of participants. Further, TANF data show that participation in activities is not universal. In FY2003, states reported that of about 1.5 million adult recipients of cash assistance, 57% were not working or in a job preparation activity for a month. (Note that these adults are not *reported* in an activity. States may underreport activity that is not countable toward TANF work participation standards.)

Current Law Work Participation Standard

Nominally, current TANF law sets a participation standard that requires 50% of families with an adult to be engaged in work. A separate standard of 90% applies to the two-parent component of the caseload. However, the actual participation standards states face are usually far lower than the nominal participation standards. TANF law provides a “caseload reduction credit,” which reduces the 50% standard by one percentage point for each percent decline in the cash assistance caseload that occurred since FY1995 (pre-welfare reform). Many states have had large caseload declines, and in FY2003 there were 20 states with declines of 50% or more, reducing the effective (after credit) standard to 0%. On average, the FY2003 national work participation rate was about 30% — all states except Nevada and Guam met their work participation standard, though most with rates well below the nominal 50% standard found in TANF law.

The large caseload reduction credits have lessened the impact of the participation standards. They have allowed states to have more participants in “noncreditable” activities (e.g., education) and perhaps led to lower overall participation.

Welfare Reauthorization Revisions to TANF Work Participation Standards

The 2002 Bush Administration welfare reauthorization proposals envisioned a substantial rewrite of the TANF work participation standards. The participation standard would have been raised from its current 50% to 70%; the caseload reduction credit would have been replaced with a credit for employed welfare leavers; families would have had to participate 40 hours per week; and, except for a three month period allowed for recipients to focus solely on job search and short-term training, a minimum of 24 hours per week in work or workfare would have been required for states to receive credit for a family’s participation.

The House passed a slightly modified version of the Administration’s work proposal three times — in 2002, 2003, and in the House-passed version of the budget reconciliation

bill in 2005. Three times (in 2002, 2003, and S. 667 in 2005) the Senate Finance Committee reported different modifications to the work rules, though none of these proposals passed the full Senate. The Finance Committee approach was to generally expand the activities that count toward the participation standards, in part by increasing the amount of education that would have been countable under TANF work standards.

The conference agreement on the budget reconciliation bill (S. 1932) does not overhaul TANF work participation standards. It retains the current 50% standard, current rules for the minimum hours that count toward the participation standard, and current list of activities that are creditable for work participation. However, the agreement makes the following changes:

- ***The caseload reduction credit is revised, so that work participation standards are reduced only for caseload reductions that occur from FY2005 into the future.*** This is effective beginning in FY2007. Thus, absent further caseload declines, a state would face a 50% TANF work participation standard in contrast to the much reduced standards they would face under current law.
- ***Count families in state-funded “Separate State Programs” (SSPs) in the work participation rate calculation.*** Under current law, states may assist TANF-like families in state-funded programs, and count spending in those programs toward the TANF state spending requirement (known as the “maintenance of effort” or MOE). Families in SSPs are not counted in the work participation rates. The agreement provides that, beginning in FY2007, families in SSPs are to be included in the participation rate calculation. This prevents states from increasing their participation rate simply by moving nonparticipating families into SSPs.
- ***Require HHS to develop standards for states to define work activities and verify work participation.*** HHS is to develop regulations June 30, 2006 and states would be required to implement procedures for verifying work by the end of FY2006.

These changes are likely to increase required participation standards significantly for states. The national average work participation rate in FY2003 was about 30% — so requiring 50% of families to participate requires states to significantly boost their participation. Further, work participation rates varied greatly among the states (see FY2003 work participation data at [<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/particip/indexparticip.htm#2003>.]); some states will have to increase their participation rates more than others.

Child Support Enforcement, Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives, Abstinence Education, and Marriage Promotion

In 2004, children in families headed by a single mother had a poverty rate of 41.9%, compared with a rate of 8.9% for children in families headed by a married couple. The majority of poor children (in 2004, 57.2% of all poor children in families) live in families headed by a single mother. Welfare-to-work initiatives have focused on getting such single mothers into the workforce. While there has been a sharp increase in work among single

mothers, many single mothers and their children remain poor. The fifth annual TANF report states “welfare reform has been very successful at getting a significant portion of cases into the workplace and into second and sometimes third jobs, but it has been less effective in keeping them employed full-time and in achieving substantial wage or career growth.” The sixth annual TANF report indicates that in FY2002 the average monthly earnings of TANF recipients who were employed was \$678 or \$8,136 per year (the poverty level for a three-person family in 2002 was \$1,196 per month or \$14,348 for the year). Child support payments are now recognized as a very significant income source for single-parent families.

Increasingly, attention has focused on the role of the noncustodial parent, usually the father, in the economic support and development of his children. Research has shown that low-income fathers tend to face some of the same issues as do low-income mothers, such as being very likely to work intermittently and/or in low-wage jobs, thereby limiting their ability to help support their children. These findings, together with a growing sentiment that noncustodial fathers are more likely to be “dead broke” than “deadbeats,” have fostered a more sympathetic view of noncustodial fathers. Beginning in 1996, Congress has considered bills that would specifically authorize funding for programs designed to help noncustodial fathers meet both their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children (also including components related to marriage promotion and effective parenting). These programs are generally referred to as “responsible fatherhood” programs.

In recognition of the often negative, long-term consequences associated with teenage pregnancy, Congress has provided funding for the prevention of teenage and out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Reducing nonmarital pregnancy, especially among teenagers, was an important focus of the 1996 welfare law. In recent years, funding has shifted toward abstinence education rather than comprehensive sexual education as the more effective way to reduce teenage pregnancy. The 109th Congress has continued the debate on which approach is more effective.

The goals of welfare reform include reducing welfare dependency through work, job preparation and marriage; reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and promoting the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Although the 1996 welfare reform law did reflect a new interest in marriage for welfare families, most of the policy changes implemented after the 1996 law focused almost exclusively on encouraging work and did not directly address the marriage goals. The House and Senate welfare reauthorization bills and the budget reconciliation conference agreement specifically include funding for programs exclusively designed to promote marriage among low-income persons, which is seen by its supporters as a way to improve the economic well-being and development of children.

Child Support Enforcement

Though much of the media focus on welfare reform in the mid-1990s was on TANF and its work and time limit requirements, the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program has also been undergoing change. (See CRS Report 97-408, *Child Support Enforcement: Recent Reforms and Potential Issues*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.) The CSE program began in 1975 as a program to collect child support from the noncustodial parents of children on welfare. If the child support collected on behalf of the welfare family was insufficient to lift the family’s income above the state’s cash welfare eligibility limit the family received the welfare cash benefit and the child support payment was distributed to reimburse the state and

federal government for cash welfare costs in proportion to their assistance to the family. If, however, the welfare family's income, including the child support payment, exceeded the state's welfare cash benefit standard, the family's cash welfare benefits were ended and the family received the entire amount of child support collected on their behalf. In addition to cost-recovery efforts with regard to welfare families, the CSE program has always collected child support on behalf of nonwelfare families in an effort to prevent them from coming onto the welfare rolls. Over time, the CSE program has evolved from a program whose primary focus was cost-recovery to a program that is focusing on service delivery.

In FY2004, a total of \$21.9 billion was collected in child support (this is twice as much as FY2003 cash assistance), with a little less than half (43%) collected on behalf of families with no current or prior connection to the welfare system. The \$21.9 billion collected in FY2004 was nearly double pre-welfare reform CSE collections. Though the increase in child support collections shows some progress in getting noncustodial parents to help support their children, collections totaled only 18% of the total obligations in support orders in the CSE program. According to an Urban Institute study, on average child support constitutes 17% of family income for households that receive it. For poverty-level children whose families do not receive TANF, child support constitutes about 30% of family income.

The 1996 welfare reform law established several new enforcement collection mechanisms to obtain child support from noncustodial parents and created an array of database systems of wage and employment information to find parents delinquent in their payments. The law also revised rules so as to pay more child support collected on behalf of former welfare families to the family.

The budget reconciliation conference agreement would provide financial incentives to states that send more child support collected on behalf of families on welfare to the family itself (rather than retained as reimbursement for welfare costs). Under the agreement, the federal government would pay for a share of support passed-through to welfare families as long as that support did not reduce the family's welfare benefit. The measure also would give states financing incentives to send to former welfare families more of the child support payments collected on their behalf. In addition, it would revise some child support enforcement collection mechanisms and add others.

The budget reconciliation conference agreement includes provisions that would prohibit the federal government from matching child support incentive payments reinvested in the program and require states to assess a \$25 annual fee for child support services provided to families with no connection to the welfare system. (A House-passed provision to gradually reduce (from FY2007-FY2010) the federal matching rate for child support administrative expenditures from its current level of 66% to 50% is not included in the conference agreement.)

Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives

Enforcement of child support orders is only one dimension of current efforts to connect noncustodial parents (usually fathers) with their children. In the hopes of improving the lives of children living in single-parent families, government and public and private organizations support programs to promote the financial and personal responsibility of noncustodial parents, which have become known as "responsible fatherhood" programs.

Research has recognized that low-income noncustodial fathers have similar problems in the workforce as do single mothers — low wages and intermittent employment. Some responsible fatherhood programs focus on employment skills, in part to help noncustodial parents meet their child support obligations. In addition, responsible fatherhood programs generally teach a variety of social skills, including parenting education, responsible decision-making, conflict resolution, coping with stress, and appropriate disciplinary practices. Responsible fatherhood programs also usually provide a peer support component. Some programs also include funding for media campaigns to advertise to the public the importance of emotional, physical, psychological, and financial connections of fathers to their children.

The TANF block grant is one potential source of funding for responsible fatherhood initiatives. Moreover, the pending welfare reauthorization bills would establish categorical competitive grants, ranging from \$20 million to \$76 million per year, to community and faith-based organizations for responsible fatherhood initiatives. (See CRS Report RL31025, *Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.) The budget reconciliation conference agreement includes competitive grants of \$50 million per year for five years for responsible fatherhood programs.

Currently, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) provides \$1.5 million annually to fund Responsible Fatherhood demonstrations under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act. Projects are presently being funded in the following eight states: California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Abstinence Education

Teenage pregnancy and nonmarital births were central issues in the 1996 welfare reform debate. The United States has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births among the industrialized countries. One 1996 study found that 40% of young women become pregnant at least once before they reach the age of 20. Most research indicates that at least 80% of these pregnancies are unintended.

The 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193, Section 510 of the Social Security Act) provided \$50 million per year for five years, FY1998-FY2002, in federal funds for an abstinence education formula block grant program. Since FY2003, the abstinence-only block grant has been funded through temporary, short-term extensions. The block grant is currently funded through December 31, 2005. Funds must be requested by states when they solicit Maternal and Child Health (MCH) block grant funds, and must be used exclusively for the teaching of abstinence. To receive federal funding, a state must match every \$4 in federal funds with \$3 in state funds. Although both the House and Senate welfare reauthorization bills (H.R. 240 and S. 667) would authorize and appropriate funding for the abstinence-only education block grant program through FY2010, the budget reconciliation conference agreement appropriates funding for the program only through December 31, 2006.

To ensure that the abstinence-only message is not diluted, the law stipulated that the term “abstinence education” means an educational or motivational program that teaches — (1) the social, psychological, and health gains of abstaining from sexual activity; (2) abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children; (3) abstinence is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy,

STDs, and associated health problems; (4) a mutually faithful monogamous relationship within marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity; (5) sexual activity outside of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects; (6) bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society; (7) young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and (8) the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sex.

Beginning with FY2001, several appropriation bills have included funding for abstinence-only education. This funding was provided through the Department of Health and Human Services via the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance (SPRANS) program for abstinence education to bolster the abstinence-only message for adolescents aged 12 through 18. Funding for the SPRANS program for abstinence education amounted to \$20 million in FY2001, \$40 million in FY2002, \$55 million in FY2003, \$70 million in FY2004, and \$100 million in FY2005. In addition, the Adolescent Family Life (AFL) program (enacted in 1981 by P.L. 97-35) provides funding for matters related to adolescent sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting. Funding for abstinence-only education under the AFL program amounted to \$9 million in FY2001, \$10 million in FY2002, \$10 million in FY2003, \$10 million in FY2004, and \$13 million in FY2005.

The debate over whether teens should be given the unambiguous and exclusive message that sex outside of marriage is wrong, or a more comprehensive message that tells teenagers that they should not engage in sexual activities, but if they do they should practice "safe sex," is very controversial. Advocates of the more comprehensive approach to sex education argue that today's youth need information and decision-making skills to make realistic and practical decisions about whether to engage in sexual activities. They contend that such an approach allows young people to make informed decisions regarding abstinence, gives them the information they need to set relationship limits and to resist peer pressure, and also provides them with information on the use of contraceptives and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Advocates of the abstinence education approach argue that teenagers need to hear a single, unambiguous message that sex outside of marriage is wrong and harmful to their physical and emotional health. They contend that youth can and should be empowered to say no to sex. They argue that supporting both abstinence and birth control is hypocritical and undermines the strength of an abstinence-only message.

Marriage Promotion

Research indicates that children in families headed by both of their biological parents "do better" on an array of child development outcomes (higher academic achievement, lower teenage child bearing, lower levels of delinquency, etc.) than children living in single-parent families. Much of this is due to the lower incomes of children in single-parent families, but the statistical association between family type and child outcomes holds even when considering families of equivalent incomes. However, in a note of caution, these better outcomes hold only when a child lives with both of his or her biological parents — they do not apply to stepchildren. Further, there are concerns about promoting marriage when some relationships are violent. Additionally, there is the caveat to interpreting social science research that "correlation does not equal causation." The actual cause of the difference in child outcomes could be differences in characteristics and behaviors (some not observed for purposes of statistical study) associated with married versus unmarried parents.

The Administration is currently funding research to address the question of whether marriage promotion programs could achieve their goals. HHS is currently conducting large-scale research projects to evaluate the impact of marriage promotion. Actual findings regarding the impacts of these programs are several years away. The budget reconciliation conference agreement provides up to \$100 million in funding for each of five years for marriage promotion research and demonstration projects. Additionally it would provide \$50 million per year for responsible fatherhood programs (as described earlier under Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives).

CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS, REPORTS, AND DOCUMENTS

House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources. *Hearing on Welfare Reform Reauthorization Proposals*, February 10, 2005, witness list and testimony posted at [<http://waysandmeans.house.gov/hearings.asp?formmode=detail&hearing=373&comm=2>].

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FOR ADDITIONAL READING

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- Duncan, Greg J., and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, ed. *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*. Russell Sage Foundation, 1997.
- CRS Report RL32817, *Child Care Issues in the 109th Congress*, by Melinda Gish.
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- CRS Report RL32682, *Children in Poverty: Profile, Trends, and Issues*, by Vee Burke, Tom Gabe, and Gene Falk.
- CRS Report RL31025, *Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.
- CRS Report RL31698, *Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA) Under Medicaid*, by April Grady.
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