

## **New Welfare Proposals Would Require Mothers Receiving Assistance to Work More than the Average American Mom; Child Care Inadequate**

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### **Current TANF Work Requirements and Proposed Changes**

Presently, the federal welfare law requires that 50 percent of single-parent families and 90 percent of two-parent families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) be engaged in a work activity. Single-parent families must work 30 hours per week, unless they have a child under the age of 6 in which case the work requirement drops to 20 hours per week. Two-parent families have a work requirement of 35 hours per week. The federal guidelines permit states to exempt parents with children under 12 months of age from these work requirements.

Several reauthorization proposals, including those by the Bush Administration and Senators Evan Bayh and Tom Carper, have suggested setting the work participation rates at 70 percent for all families receiving TANF and extending the weekly work requirement to 40 hours. The Administration's plan would divide the 40 hours into 24 hours of direct work and 16 hours of more loosely defined work participation. In addition, while states would be able to continue to exempt parents with children under 12 months from the work requirements, parents with children under the age of 6 would see an increase in their required work participation to 40 hours per week.

### **The Hours Mothers Typically Work**

Using the 2001 March Supplement to the Current Population Survey, a federal survey conducted monthly by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Institute for Women's Policy Research analyzed mothers' work experience as reported for the year 2000, broken down by year-round employment (50 or more weeks per year) or less than year-round employment, as well as the number of hours worked in the previous week. Year-round employment is defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as working 50 or more weeks per year to allow for up to two weeks off for vacation. Sick leave and other time-off may also be available to employees working standard year-round employment.

Because a child's age affects a mother's work, we also examined work hours by the age of the mother's youngest child. Children are categorized into three age groups: infants under 12 months, young children between the ages of 1 and 5, and school-aged children between 6 and 17 years of age. Work experience is considered separately for low-income mothers (below 200 percent of the federal poverty line), mothers living in poverty (below 100 percent of the poverty line), and mothers receiving TANF.

It is important to note that, because this analysis tabulates data for mothers who worked at any time during the previous year, it tends to overstate mothers' labor force participation. Labor force participation is ordinarily measured at a single point in time, and refers to the proportion of all people in a given category who either work or are looking for work. The data reported here, which are based on reported work experience throughout the year, will always yield higher proportions working than are reflected in labor force participation rates.

**Our analysis reveals that only 36 percent of all mothers work year-round at 40 or more hours per week.** The average number of hours worked per week for mothers who reported some work during the year is 30.9 hours for the weeks when they are working. These figures for all mothers are much lower than the Administration's proposal to require that 70 percent of TANF recipients work 40 hours per week. Not surprisingly, single mothers are generally more likely to report working year-round at 40 or more hours per week; still, only about 41 percent work that much. Single mothers average 31.5 hours per week for the weeks they work; those single mothers who work year-round average 35.9 hours per week.

Work participation patterns also differ according to broad income categories. Among low-income families, 64 percent of all mothers and 73 percent of single mothers reported working at some point in the year 2000, but only 23 percent and 29 percent, respectively, worked 40 or more hours per week year-round. For families who live below the poverty line, 61 percent of single mothers reported working compared with 53 percent of all poor mothers. The percent working 40 or more hours per week year-round declines to 14 percent for poor single mothers and 11 percent for all poor mothers. Although stable, year-round employment is rare for poor families, it is telling that nearly 500,000 remain poor despite the mothers having found full-time year-round work.

Of those receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), 52 percent of mothers who are single reported working at some time during the year 2000. Only 4.5 percent worked year-round at 40 or more hours per week. The average work week for single mothers who receive TANF is 15.8 hours per week; for those who report year-round work it is 26.8 hours.

### **Inadequate Child Care**

The Administration's proposal would increase work participation requirements without increasing child care funding. The availability of child care is an essential element in enabling parents to enter the workforce. Finding child care is particularly challenging for low-income families (Coley, Chase-Lansdale, and Li-Grining 2001). Currently, the federal welfare law prevents single parents with children under the age of six from being sanctioned (losing benefits) for non-compliance with work requirements if they are unable to find child care. No bill

currently seeks to curtail this protection, but bills submitted by Rep. Patsy Mink and Rep. Benjamin Cardin would extend protection. Funding for child care is administered through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which is increased in the Cardin and Bayh/Carper bills but not under the Administration's proposal.

Recent statistics released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reveal that in 1999 only 12 percent of eligible children in low-income families, or 1.8 million children, received federal assistance for child care (Kharfen 2000). A recent study (Layzer and Collins 2000) showed that between 1997 and 1999 twelve of seventeen states examined faced a 30 percent expansion in the number of children receiving subsidies (data were incomplete for two states so growth could not be determined). However, the states still reached only 15 to 20 percent of federally-eligible children and waiting lists existed in 12 of the 17 states. Shortages in child care facilities were more frequent in low-income neighborhoods, for specific populations like infants and children with special needs, and for parents with nontraditional work hours (Layzer and Collins 2000).

### **Mothers' Work Hours by Age of Youngest Child**

Child rearing responsibilities for young children and infants and the lack of available child care greatly affect the work behavior of mothers. The impact that the age of the youngest child has on mothers' reported work experience is as follows:

#### **For mothers with school-aged children (6 to 17)**

- 80 percent of all mothers reported working at some time during 2000 and 42 percent worked year-round at 40 or more hours per week.
- 84 percent of single mothers reported working at some time during 2000 and 47 percent worked year-round at 40 or more hours per week.
- The average mother with only school-aged children worked 32.7 hours per week when working, while the average single mother with only school-aged children worked 33.4 hours per week when working.
- Of those mothers who worked year-round in 2000, single mothers averaged 36.5 hours per week and all mothers averaged 35.9 hours per week.

#### **For mothers with young children between 1 and 5 years of age**

- 71 percent of all mothers reported working at some time during 2000 and 32 percent worked year-round at 40 or more hours per week.
- 80 percent of single mothers reported working at some time during 2000 and 37 percent worked year-round at 40 or more hours per week.

- The average mother whose youngest child is pre-school aged worked 29.4 hours per week when working, while the average single mother whose youngest child is pre-school aged worked 30.1 hours per week when working.
- Of those mothers who worked year-round in 2000, single mothers averaged 35.6 hours per week and all mothers averaged 34.3 hours per week.

### **For mothers with infants under 12 months**

- 67 percent of all mothers with infants reported working at some time during 2000, but only 18 percent worked year-round at 40 or more hours per week.
- 63 percent of single mothers with infants reported working at some time during 2000, but only 14 percent worked year-round at 40 or more hours per week.
- The average mother whose youngest child is an infant worked 23.7 hours per week when working, while the average single mother whose youngest child is an infant worked 20.0 hours per week when working.
- Of those mothers who worked year-round in 2000, all mothers of infants averaged 31.0 hours per week and single mothers of infants averaged 29.2 hours.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Because the above data show that year-round, full-time work is unrealistic for most low-income mothers, we offer recommendations that more realistically reflect mothers' typical work hours and that would allow the increased use of education, training, and care giving as substitutes for unrealistic amounts of employment. Our recommendations follow:

- Decrease or retain current work requirements; do not increase work requirements.
- Expand the definition of work activities to include GED, ESL and post-secondary education as well as job training.
- Eliminate the 30 percent cap on the number of TANF recipients who can count education and training activities as work.
- Include care giving as a work activity for a child who is disabled or under the age of six and for a family member with a serious health condition.
- Prevent states from sanctioning parents for not meeting work requirements when child care for children under 13 years of age is unavailable.
- Significantly expand the Child Care Development and Block Grant with the goal of serving all low-income children.

## **References**

Coley, Rebekah Levine, P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, and Christine P. Li-Grining. 2001. *Child Care in the Era of Welfare Reform: Quality, Choices, and Preferences*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.

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**Table 1. Work Experience of All Mothers in 2000**

	All Mothers				Single Mothers			
	All Children	< 12 months	Ages 1 to 5	Ages 6 to 17	All Children	< 12 months	Ages 1 to 5	Ages 6 to 17
Weighted N (in millions)	37.6	3.1	14.0	20.5	10.6	.7	3.9	5.9
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not Working for Wages (%)	24.3	33.1	28.9	19.8	19.4	37.5	20.3	16.5
Working Any Time in Year (%)	75.7	67.0	71.1	80.2	80.6	62.5	79.7	83.5
Average hours of work	30.9	23.7	29.4	32.7	31.5	20.0	30.1	33.4
Worked less than 50 wks/yr (%)	21.1	36.7	22.0	18.2	22.1	37.5	26.1	17.5
Average hours of work	19.9	17.6	18.4	21.8	19.6	13.8	19.0	21.9
Worked 50 or more wks/yr (%)	54.6	30.2	49.1	62.0	58.5	25.0	53.6	66.0
0-29 hrs/wk (%)	10.9	8.9	10.9	11.3	9.4	8.6	9.2	9.6
30 or more hrs/wk (%)	43.7	21.3	38.2	50.7	49.1	16.4	44.4	56.4
40 or more hours/wk (%)	36.2	17.5	31.6	42.1	40.8	14.2	37.2	46.6
Average hours of work	35.2	31.0	34.3	35.9	35.9	29.2	35.6	36.5

*Note:* Percents may not equal 100.0 due to rounding.

**Source:** Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the 2001 Current Population Survey, March Demographic Supplement.

**Table 2. Work Experience of All Low-Income Mothers in 2000 (Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line)**

	All Low-Income Mothers				Single Low-Income Mothers			
	All Children	< 12 months	Ages 1 to 5	Ages 6 to 17	All Children	< 12 months	Ages 1 to 5	Ages 6 to 17
Weighted N (in millions)	12.2	1.3	5.2	5.7	6.4	.6	2.6	3.2
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not Working for Wages (%)	36.4	48.9	38.3	31.8	26.8	43.0	26.5	24.2
Working Any Time in Year (%)	63.6	51.1	61.7	68.2	73.2	57.0	73.5	75.7
Average hours of work	26.9	19.6	26.4	28.7	28.2	17.9	27.4	30.2
Worked less than 50 wks/yr (%)	25.7	34.2	26.9	22.7	26.8	37.5	30.5	22.0
Average hours of work	17.3	14.3	17.2	18.5	17.8	12.2	17.8	19.3
Worked 50 or more wks/yr (%)	37.9	17.0	34.8	45.5	46.4	19.5	43.1	53.8
0-29 hrs/wk (%)	8.8	4.9	8.3	10.2	9.3	6.6	8.7	10.3
30 or more hrs/wk (%)	29.1	12.0	26.5	35.3	37.1	12.9	34.4	43.5
40 or more hours/wk (%)	22.6	9.8	21.1	26.7	29.4	11.1	27.9	33.8
Average hours of work	33.5	30.3	33.4	33.7	34.2	28.8	34.2	34.6

*Note:* Percents may not equal 100.0 due to rounding.

**Source:** Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the 2001 Current Population Survey, March Demographic Supplement.

**Table 3. Work Experience of All Mothers Living in Poverty in 2000 (Below 100% of the Federal Poverty Line)**

	All Poor Mothers				Single Poor Mothers			
	All Children	< 12 months	Ages 1 to 5	Ages 6 to 17	All Children	< 12 months	Ages 1 to 5	Ages 6 to 17
Weighted N (in millions)	4.8	.6	2.1	2.1	3.2	.4	1.4	1.4
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Not Working for Wages (%)	46.6	58.9	46.3	43.5	38.9	49.7	37.5	37.6
Working Any Time in Year (%)	53.4	41.1	53.7	56.5	61.1	50.4	62.6	62.4
Average hours of work	22.3	12.6	22.0	24.5	23.2	12.5	22.4	26.1
Worked less than 50 wks/yr (%)	29.1	34.5	30.7	26.0	33.2	41.1	36.6	28.0
Average hours of work	15.9	10.2	16.2	17.7	16.9	10.1	17.0	19.1
Worked 50 or more wks/yr (%)	24.3	6.6	23.0	30.5	28.0	9.3	26.0	34.4
0-29 hrs/wk (%)	8.2	2.7	7.6	10.3	8.4	4.3	8.2	9.6
30 or more hrs/wk (%)	16.1	3.9	15.3	20.2	19.5	5.0	17.8	24.8
40 or more hours/wk (%)	11.0	3.1	10.7	13.6	13.8	4.2	12.9	17.1
Average hours of work	29.9	25.1	29.9	30.2	30.8	23.4	30.0	31.8

*Note:* Percents may not equal 100.0 due to rounding.

**Source:** Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the 2001 Current Population Survey, March Demographic Supplement.



**Table 4. Work Experience of Low-Income Mothers with Children under Age 18 Receiving TANF in 2000**

	All Mothers	Single Mothers
Weighted N (in millions)	1.1	.9
Total (%)	100.0	100.0
Not Working for Wages (%)	48.8	47.6
Working Any Time during Year (%)	51.2	52.4
Average hours of work	16.0	15.8
Worked less than 50 wks/yr (%)	38.9	39.4
Worked 50 or more wks/yr (%)	12.3	13.0
0-29 hrs/wk (%)	4.6	4.7
30 or more hrs/wk (%)	7.7	8.3
40 or more hours/wk (%)	4.6	4.5
Average hours of work (%)	27.6	26.8

*Note:* Percents may not equal 100.0 due to rounding.

**Source:** Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the 2001 Current Population Survey, March Demographic Supplement.