



*Mary Fallin*

*Governor*

August 13, 2012

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I am alarmed by the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Information Memorandum regarding the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, released on July 12<sup>th</sup>. The work participation rate waiver included in this memorandum is beyond the legal scope of authority of HHS and the State of Oklahoma has no intention to seek or accept such a waiver to weaken welfare work requirements under the TANF program.

I am concerned that this new policy will reverse the many successes achieved as a result of the landmark welfare reforms of 1996. When these reforms were passed, governors of both parties participated in the process. Strong federal work requirements were a central aspect of this reform and it has resulted in many successful state innovations. Data confirms that the 1996 welfare reform program has been a major success in helping individuals and families move from welfare into jobs and assisting in significantly decreasing child poverty rates. In Oklahoma, the welfare caseload drastically declined from 99,035 recipients in 1996 to 19,865 recipients in 2011. This is an astounding accomplishment not only for our state but also for the thousands of individuals who have worked so hard to improve the quality of their own lives. This victory should be reinforced through sound policies, not deconstructed to setback progress.

While it is true that states have advocated for flexibility in many of the welfare programs HHS manages, this Memorandum regarding TANF goes well outside of the scope of those requests. We must empower Americans and build a stronger society by encouraging individual responsibility. I urge you to carefully review the underlying framework of the 1996 TANF law and to reevaluate your authority to waive state work requirements for TANF beneficiaries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Fallin".

Mary Fallin  
Governor