



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

August 23, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On July 12, 2012, we received information from Kathleen Sebelius, your Secretary of Health & Human services that states could apply for waivers of requirements for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

After reviewing the guidance, I am strongly concerned that this action will turn back the clock on important, bipartisan reforms that were enacted in 1996 by President Clinton and members of Congress. As much as I favor extending states greater flexibility, weakening incentives for recipients to find jobs is not the flexibility that will help states, the country and most importantly our vulnerable citizens.

TANF has been remarkably effective. The introduction of a work requirement in 1996 helped millions of people transition out of government dependency into self-sufficiency through the dignity of labor. Nationwide, the cash-assistance caseload declined from 12.3 million recipients to 4.6 million recipients between 1996 and 2011.

Scaling back this important reform will mean disaster for those whom the program is meant to help. Caseloads will increase, which will place tremendous burden on states that are already facing difficult budget realities. Most importantly, the reforms you are proposing will trap more Americans in welfare dependency. This is exactly what happened in Pennsylvania before I took office. In previous years, when Pennsylvania's TANF program relaxed work requirements, the state's placement of adults into full-time jobs decreased significantly. This is not acceptable. Pennsylvania's citizens deserve better. With recent changes in Pennsylvania's program that emphasizes "work first" we are starting to see results. The number of individuals who have left TANF for employment in June and July of this year is the highest in over six years. Able-bodied TANF recipients want a paycheck – not a welfare check; and the job requirement is the mechanism that will help them achieve the independence that so many of them seek.

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Given that TANF serves as a gateway to other welfare programs, a "relaxed" enforcement of "work" places a strain on the entire system -- unsustainable demands on our other human service programs, including Medicaid, SNAP, housing and energy assistance programs. But after restructuring our programs to focus on work this year and introducing new performance based contracting for those who place welfare recipients in jobs, we are beginning to see more TANF recipients find a better life through employment and place fewer demands on taxpayers.

The flexibility offered through this potential waiver will simply lock states into another round of caseload expansion and escalate welfare spending. More importantly, it will handicap our ability to ensure that an effective safety net is preserved for the truly needy who temporarily have no other means of support. The larger public welfare system is in need of substantial reform as it breeds unsustainable rates of long-term dependency (not temporary assistance) and heavier tax burdens on working Americans.

If you are seriously interested in granting states more authority and flexibility to manage their programs, I ask that you work with Pennsylvania on a broader approach that would provide Pennsylvania authority to reconfigure our entire welfare system beyond TANF, focus on placing individuals into gainful employment and empower states to help individuals break the cycle of dependency on all public-assistance programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Corbett". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

TOM CORBETT

Governor