



**PHIL BRYANT**  
GOVERNOR

August 10, 2012

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

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I am deeply concerned by the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Information Memorandum released on July 12th which detailed your intention to allow states to waive welfare work requirements under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF). States have advocated for flexibility in many of the welfare programs HHS manages, including the Medicaid program, but this Informational Memorandum regarding TANF goes beyond any original request for flexibility. By eliminating the work requirements, you are creating a dangerous policy precedent and deterring Americans from becoming more self-sufficient. The existing work requirement should remain intact and any reauthorization proposal of TANF should incentivize personal accountability to move from welfare to work.

When Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 "to end welfare as we know it," Mississippi was the first state to take advantage of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. Our program is structured and managed to assist TANF families to become self-sufficient, ensure compliance with TANF obligations and achieve higher work participation rates mandated by Federal Regulations. We have worked diligently to create the most efficient and effective TANF Program possible to help our low-income families build a better life for themselves and their children while meeting federal requirements.

Mississippi developed new strategies and policies to ensure TANF recipients become fully engaged in employment assistant activities, ultimately finding employment and becoming self-sufficient. Since that change, Mississippi has been recognized as having the highest TANF Work Program Participation Rate in the nation. In 2011, our state's TANF Work Program Participation Rate was 70.06%. In addition, we have lowered the total amount of recipients in the program from 124,248 in 1996 to 25,079 in 2011.

I am hopeful that you will reconsider the intentions of the 1996 TANF law and reassess your authority to waive state work requirements for TANF beneficiaries.

Sincerely,  
  
Phil Bryant  
Governor

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