May 16, 2023

In recent days some members of Congress have been pushing for further restrictions on the underfunded Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. As an organization focused on the well-being of our nation's children, we view new proposals to penalize parents and caregivers through additional work requirements—which will not save federal budget dollars—to be extremely harmful to children.

As a participant in the panel that produced the 2019 *National Academy of Sciences report, A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*, I can attest that such proposals did not meet the evidence requirement to be included among the effective ways to address poverty. In fact, the report found, *"There is insufficient evidence to identify mandatory work policies that would reliably reduce child poverty, and it appears that **work requirements are at least as likely to increase as to decrease poverty**. The dearth of evidence also reflects underinvestment over the past two decades in methodologically strong evaluations of the impacts of alternative work programs,"* (emphasis added).[1]

Further restrictions on the shrinking TANF block grant, like those currently proposed, will harm children, increase child poverty, and threaten to push more families toward the child welfare system at a time when our systems and programs are prioritizing keeping families together.

Any discussion about reforms to TANF must be separate from the debt ceiling debate and they must start with a fundamental emphasis on reducing stress on parents and families and lifting children out of poverty. Current House budget proposals will exacerbate stress rather than relieve it, and we urge Congress to reject such new restrictions.

Christine James Brown

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[1] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. P. 210. https://doi.org/10.17226/25246.