



# Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Chairman

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**STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN MAX BAUCUS  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
HEARING ON TANF REAUTHORIZATION:  
BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES**

This is our third full committee hearing on the reauthorization of the landmark 1996 welfare reform law. As I've said before, the 1996 welfare reform law was a bold experiment. The old system had failed, so we tried something new. I strongly supported the bill. As we have reviewed the results so far, I'm glad I did. Now it's time to build on that success.

Today we're talking about how to strengthen families. In the end, welfare reform should be about creating more opportunities for children in low-income families. We want them to have a chance to live the American dream too. Part of that is doing all we can to make sure they grow up in supportive loving homes. We've learned something in the last few years about moving mothers from welfare to work. The welfare caseload is down by half and hundreds of thousands of mothers have exchanged a welfare check for a paycheck. But we know less about the most effective ways to promote stronger families. There are a lot of perspectives and we will hear some difference of opinion today.

To begin, I'd like to share my perspective on several important issues. The Administration has proposed grants to promote marriage. We need to be cautious here. I'm from Montana. In my state, we don't think the government has much business getting into your life. To me, like most Montanans, marriage is a personal and private choice. It's not something the government should interfere with. That said, the Committee will listen to what Dr. Horn has to say and we will listen to Commissioner Hendrick's description of what Oklahoma does to promote marriage.

In return, I hope they will listen to other perspectives, such as those represented by the rest of our witnesses. For example, I believe Dr. Sawhill is right to point out the importance of reducing teen pregnancies. Even with the recent decline in teen birth rates, we still must do better with prevention. A teenager who has a child often drops out of school and is less likely to form a stable long-term relationship with the father of her child. This combination is a recipe for poverty. I also think we need to change the rules for child support, so that more of a father's payment gets to his child. I'm glad Vicki Turetsky is here to talk about that.

I want to thank Senator Snowe for her important legislation in this area. And finally, I am glad to welcome a fellow Montanan, Kate Kahan, as a witness here today. From her work with low-income mothers she can provide us with a reality check. There are still too many women suffering from domestic violence in this country. We need to be careful that policies intended to promote marriage do not result in more women and children become victims of batterers. It's easy to say that we should promote marriage. It is a wonderful institution. But when legislating in this area, Congress must proceed with care.

I welcome our witnesses for an important discussion today. I especially welcome Ms. Kahan, who has come all the way from my state to be here today. I'm glad she could join us.