



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Statement of U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley, of Iowa
Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance
Field Hearing – "Welfare Reform: Past Successes, New Challenges"
Thursday, February 20, 2003

Good morning. We will hear from two panels this morning. The first panel will discuss the success of the 1996 welfare reform law, and the second panel will discuss areas where the 1996 welfare reform law needs to be improved.

In 1996, the Congress passed historic and comprehensive welfare reform legislation that ended welfare as we had known it. Gone was an individual entitlement, replaced by a block grant to states and considerable flexibility for the states to design and implement their welfare program. The new law, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) replaced the 60 year old Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC).

Last year, the Congress failed to enact the reauthorization of the 1996 act. We must get this done this year. The House of Representatives has already passed H.R. 4, their version of the reauthorization of TANF. The Senate will not be able to act as quickly as the House, but as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, which has jurisdiction over the reauthorization, welfare reform is one of my top priorities. I am committed to enacting meaningful reform on a bipartisan basis as quickly as possible.

As part of this process. Congress needs to hear as many perspectives as possible. That is the reason you are all here today.

The overall results of welfare reform look very good. There has been an historic decline in the number of families receiving government cash assistance, a substantial increase in employment by low-income mothers and a sustained decline in child poverty.

Here in Iowa, we can point with pride to many individual success stories. Many parents have overcome significant barriers such as domestic violence, substance abuse and a lack of an education and are making progress in realizing their goals and dreams.

However, there remains much more to do. There are a number of child care and transportation challenges unique to rural areas that must be addressed. We can still do more to move individuals into meaningful, well-paying, full time work. We still need to do more to promote healthy families.

As many of you know, President Bush has proposed welfare reform policies that emphasize

the continuation of a work-focused welfare program as a top priority. His proposal picks up on many of the themes that I and others started developing in 1996. To build on our successes, we need to strengthen the work requirement for individuals and for the states so that more people can experience the dignity of holding a job. We can improve child well being by strengthening families and promoting healthy marriages. And we can encourage state innovation by granting states new flexibility to design programs to serve low-income working families.

However, as we have learned, the devil is in the details. I look forward to learning more about the successful strategies Iowans have used to make progress in moving from welfare to work, but also to learn where the 1996 Act needs to be improved. I appreciate the distance that many of you here today have traveled in order to be here.

The first panel will describe the successes of welfare reform. We will hear first from Donna Littrell who is making the transition from assistance to self-sufficiency. Then we will hear from Deb Bingaman, who Administers the TANF programs here in Iowa, will describe the successful programs Iowans have developed. Following Ms. Bingaman, we will hear from Linda Anderson, a human resources recruiter who will discuss the successful strategies used to move individuals into work.

The second panel will focus on needed improvements to the current law. We are honored to have Representative Dave Heaton who knows these laws inside and out. We will then hear from Sonja Marquez who will speak to us about the challenges associated with rural child care and transportation issues. Finally, we hear from Mr. Ron Haskins, who was the White House policy lead last year, about the need for family formation policies.