



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley
Senate Finance Committee Mark-up
Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone (PRIDE)
September 10, 2003

I call the committee to order. We meet today to mark up the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone Act, or PRIDE Act, which would reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Act, or TANF. I appreciate the hard work of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. Everyone has compromised to get us to where we are able to mark up today. I'm disappointed that this is not a bipartisan mark up. But I would point out that I wasn't able to support then-Chairman Baucus' mark last year either.

However, I appreciate the fact that Senator Baucus, in the Senate Finance Committee tradition, has worked to ensure that the process can go forward. I am hopeful that we will continue to work together productively, and achieve a bipartisan consensus. I am aware that a major outstanding issue is child care funding. I realize that for some, this is a key priority. My intention is to defer the issue of child care to the floor where the whole Senate can work its will. Advocates for increasing child care funding owe an enormous debt to Senator Olympia Snowe, who will take the lead on an amendment to increase child care funding when we get to the floor.

I hope that the full Senate will consider the legislation as soon as possible. The 1996 welfare reform bill ended the individual entitlement to assistance. This key reform has largely contributed to a significant and unexpected decline in the welfare rolls. The negative outcomes predicted by some have not materialized. A number of key indicators that relate to child poverty and employment have shown improvement. However, there is more that we should be doing to help families living in deep and persistent poverty. The average welfare check for a family receiving cash assistance is \$350 a month. That averages out to eleven dollars a day! We are not doing these families, and the children in them, any favors by allowing them to continue living in the isolation and despair of deep and persistent poverty. The two key improvements to the 1996 Act that I believe the Congress has an obligation to act on are: strengthening the work requirement and improving healthy family formation provisions.

Currently, most adults receiving assistance report no work activity. Clearly, that does not help move these families into self-sufficiency. Many argue that the way to move families into self-sufficiency is to encourage additional work. The legislation we are marking up today recognizes that the success achieved by TANF and Work First programs are a result of a sustained emphasis on adult attachment to the workforce. My mark would build on the success of the past by increasing

work hours for individuals and work participation rates for states. However, the mark would provide for “partial credit” for hours below the 34-hour standard set in the mark. This approach recognizes that some recipients might not meet the full-time standard; for example, persons in unsubsidized employment might be employed part-time or part of the month. This approach also recognizes that states may expend significant resources moving an individual from zero hours of activity into 20 hours of activity. States should get credit toward their participation rate for that type of effort. While some believe that work is the way to self-sufficiency, there are also those who believe that the best way to move families into self-sufficiency is through state flexibility in terms of what activities can count toward the participation rate.

The chairman’s mark includes activities that maintain all the flexibility of current law and adds new flexibility in countable activities. The mark would allow states to engage recipients in short-term “barrier” removal activities for three months in a 24-month period. Many states have such programs and some have done these under “waivers.” The mark would expand the list of activities that count after a recipient has engaged in core work activities for 24 hours. It would encourage states to provide post-employment activities, particularly education or additional job search, for working recipients to enhance their job skills and training to advance and leave welfare. I believe the approach envisioned in the mark is an appropriate compromise between these perspectives, one which favors work and one which favors increased flexibility. There are two main reasons why families fall into poverty. One is a lack of work skills and the other is a result of a single parent having to raise a child alone. I see healthy marriages as having important economic implications for children. The poverty rate for all children in married-couple families is 8.2 percent. By contrast, the poverty rate for all children in single-parent families is four times higher at 35.2 percent. I also see healthy marriages as having implications for child well-being. Research shows that children born or raised in single-parent families are more at risk for a wide range of social maladies, including poverty, welfare dependency, academic failure and crime. My mark would direct \$100 million a year for matching grants to states for programs to promote healthy marriages and \$100 million a year for research, demonstrations and technical assistance primarily associated with marriage.

Activities that could be supported by these funds include: education in high schools on relationship skills and budgeting; marriage skills and relationship skills programs which may include: parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution and job and career advancement, as well as divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills. It is important to note that the mark includes provisions which make it clear that participation in these programs is strictly voluntary and there must be coordination with domestic violence specialists. We have before the committee today a proposal which strengthens work, gives states more flexibility and promotes marriage and family. I know there are outstanding issues relative to these proposals. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on these issues. Thank you, and I turn to my friend and colleague, Senator Baucus, for his opening statement.