



Report on TANF Briefing Friday, September 5, 2003

The Center for Economic and Policy Research co-organized a congressional staffers' briefing on TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) at the U.S. Capitol on Friday, September 5, 2003. Economist Heather Boushey released a paper and presented her findings on the effects of the economic downturn on former welfare recipients and Co-Director Dean Baker moderated the event. The event was timed to coincide with the debate in Senate on a TANF reauthorization package, which must be finalized before September 30, 2003. The room was packed, with a standing-room only crowd of approximately 85 attendees, including representatives from nearly 40 different Congressional offices and committees.

Dr. Boushey joined Avis Jones-DeWeever and Vicky Lovell of the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), as well as Mark Levitan of the Community Service Society (CSS) in New York City on the panel. In explaining the current economic hardships faced by welfare recipients, the four panelists painted a clear picture of unmet economic and vocational need among the poor in the U.S. They urged the policymakers to consider a more comprehensive and realistic TANF reauthorization package that would adequately address current economic realities. Some important points made in the presentations include:

- Economic conditions are making it increasingly difficult for former welfare recipients to find and keep jobs. Unemployment is now at 6.1%, with nearly 9 million people unemployed. Among single mothers, unemployment is even higher, with 8.4% needing work, but unable to find a job.
- Less educated workers and single mothers have seen their unemployment rise during the economic downturn, more so than for other demographic groups. Similarly, their employment rates have fallen more so than for other demographic groups.
- For former welfare recipients, the labor market is even bleaker than for the population overall as many welfare recipients found employment in industries that have been hit hard by the economic downturn.

The TANF briefing was successful in bringing these issues to advocates and congressional staffers representing interests from all over the nation (see list of congressional staff and organizations below). Our outreach team worked with the team at the IWPR to make this happen through faxing an invitation to all members of Congress and doing follow-up calls to key staffers.

One immediate outcome of the event has been that the director of the Coalition on Human Needs, an alliance of over 200 national and grassroots organizations based in Washington, D.C., approached Dr. Boushey to present her findings at an upcoming Coalition meeting, at which approximately 50 organizations are represented. Also, although the briefing was targeted at congressional staffers, an associate producer attended, researching the issues for a future broadcast on welfare for PBS' *To The Contrary*.

Through working on this briefing, CEPR has established a strong working relationship with the IWPR and CSS. We plan to build on this relationship in the future through pulling together other briefings or press events.

Overall, the TANF congressional staff briefing reinforced CEPR's role as one of the foremost economic think tanks in Washington, DC covering issues of economic need.

Organizations Represented:

ABA Commission on Domestic Violence
ACORN
Administration for Children and Families
Alliance for Children & Families
American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union Washington Office
American Friends Service Committee
Bread for the World
Catholic Charities of the USA
Children's Defense Fund
Center for Sustainable Health
Coalition on Human Needs
Connecticut National Organization for Women
Context, Inc.
Family Violence Prevention Fund
Legal Action Center
Mayor Bloomberg NYC Washington Office
Mennonite Central Committee

National Advocacy Center for the Sisters of Good Shepherd
National Partnership for Women and Families
National SAFE Kids
National Education Association
NETWORK, A Catholic Social Justice Lobby
National Organization of Women
NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund
RESULTS
Suited for Change
Unitarian Universalist Association
Western Center on Law and Poverty
Yemen Embassy

Senators Represented:

Sen. Daniel Akaka
Sen. Evan Bayh
Sen. Maria Cantwell
Sen. Jon Corzine
Sen. Chuck Hagel
Sen. Frank Lautenberg
Sen. Blanche Lincoln

Sen. Rick Santorum
Sen. Charles Schumer
Sen. Debbie Stabenow

Members of Congress Represented:

Rep. Spencer Bachus
Rep. Shelley Berkley
Rep. Max Burns
Rep. Michael Capuano
Rep. Philip Crane
Rep. Barney Frank
Rep. Raul Grijalva
Rep. Mike Honda
Rep. William Janklow
Rep. Ron Kind
Rep. Jack Kingston
Rep. Dennis Kucinich
Rep. Barbara Lee
Rep. Jim Marshall
Rep. Donald Payne
Rep. Earl Pomeroy
Rep. Charles B Rangel
Rep. Ciro Rodriguez
Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard
Rep. Louise McIntosh Slaughter
Rep. Hilda Solis
Rep. John Tierney
Rep. Mark Udall
Rep. Robert Wexler

Committees Represented:

House Ways and Means Committee
House Budget Committee
Joint Economic Committee