

701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
410 547-6600
FAX 410 547-6624



The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
The Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

I am writing to you in my capacity as the President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation of Baltimore, Maryland, a national philanthropy devoted to improving the circumstances and life outcomes for disadvantaged children and families. This letter is submitted on behalf of the Casey Foundation and a consortium of other national funders interested in the well-being of the nation's children and families and how the reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant can contribute to their well-being.

I am writing with regard to one specific provision of the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone (or PRIDE) bill that the Senate Finance Committee is now using as the starting point for TANF reauthorization. As in its House counterpart, H.R.240, PRIDE would authorize \$10 million annually for the Bureau of the Census to:

“implement or enhance a longitudinal survey of program participation, ... to allow for the assessment of the outcomes of continued welfare reform on the economic and child well-being of low-income families with children,... and, to the extent possible, shall provide State representative samples. The content of the survey should include such information as may be necessary to examine the issues of out-of-wedlock childbearing, marriage, welfare dependency and compliance with work requirements, the beginning and ending of spells of assistance, work, earnings and employment stability, and the well-being of children”.

We would like to urge that you and the Department of Health and Human Services consider supporting an amendment to this provision of the legislation so that it provides more useful and more timely data about child and family well-being for *each and every state by stipulating that the survey be a state-level, cross sectional survey, in lieu of, or in addition to, a national-level longitudinal survey.*

As you know, under both PRIDE and H.R.240, TANF would increase the flexibility *of states* in operating programs designed to improve child well-being. We applaud that mandate and believe that better state-level data on TANF and other devolved safety net programs are needed, both for managing the programs and for monitoring their consequences and outcomes, especially with regard to the well-being of our nation's most vulnerable children and families. Yet both PRIDE and H.R. 240 would devote the \$10 million *not* for data useful to all of the states administering fifty TANF programs with widely varying policies, characteristics, and environments, but rather for a research survey designed for analysis at the national level.

By contrast, the survey we support would allow the provision and dissemination of important data and information relative to the implications of TANF for the well-being of children and families *in each and every state, rather than just the dozen or so feasible in the current provision*. As leaders of foundations that support the goals of TANF, we approach this issue from the perspective of wanting to ensure that state policy-makers have the tools they need to implement, manage and monitor key elements of TANF and other health and social programs that have devolved to the state level. My colleagues and I want it to be as effective as possible.

Consequently, as national philanthropies, we believe in and are working toward the promising possibility of a "joint funding" opportunity between our institutions and the federal government under a reauthorized TANF block grant. Specifically, we think that timely and reliable state-level data would be so valuable that if the bill were to provide funding for a *state-level cross-sectional survey on child and family well-being* we would be prepared to commit *in excess of \$1 million annually* in the analysis and dissemination of the data, as part of a significant private/public partnership. As you know, Senator Jay Rockefeller has introduced "The State Child Well-Being Research Act" (S.415), a free-standing bill that would authorize \$10 million annually in TANF funding for a state-level cross-sectional survey and set of indicators of child and family well-being. We are told that Senator Rockefeller's staff are actively engaged in discussions with his Senate colleagues to include the provisions of S.415 in the PRIDE bill. We urge you to consider supporting this amendment.

Support for this provision, *either in addition to, or in lieu of*, the language currently in PRIDE would be an enormous contribution to hard pressed state policy-makers and administrations across the nation. A state-level cross-sectional survey would ensure samples sizes of at least 2,000 households with children *in each and every state*, providing states with an invaluable resource to everyone concerned about the well-being of children and families. By contrast, under the current provision, sample sizes in more than half the states would be so small as to preclude state-level analyses on low-income children and families. Only a handful of states – California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois – would have sample sizes close to 2,000 or larger. Disproportionately represented among the states with inadequate sample sizes under SIPP would be the nation's less-populated and relatively rural states, including Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South

Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Moreover, data from a cross-sectional survey would be available to state policy-makers on a far more timely basis than those of a national longitudinal study, a matter of months instead of years.

We do recognize the value of a national-level longitudinal survey – one that would provide national scholars and think tank researchers with very detailed data for a few states and the nation as a whole. The ideal situation would be to make resources available to support *both* types of surveys. If, however, funds are available for only one, we believe it is critically important to ensure that hard-pressed policy-makers, TANF administrators, the media, and the public *in all fifty states* have timely and reliable state-specific data to inform their on-going management and monitoring of TANF and related programs.

Just one example will show how important state-level data is to furthering the goals of this legislation. Both PRIDE and H.R. 240 contain numerous provisions intended to encourage and facilitate the formation and sustenance of healthy marriages and intact two-parent families, as well as the avoidance of non-marital and teenage pregnancies, as important ways to improve the well-being of children. Recognizing that we lack reliable data about how best to achieve those goals, the proposed bill would encourage states to adopt a variety of different approaches and initiatives. Yet, the national-level survey funded under PRIDE and H.R.240 would be virtually worthless in helping state TANF administrators – even in larger states – to either manage their healthy marriage and family formation programs or to assess the degree to which their efforts are succeeding. By definition, a national-level survey cannot provide state-specific outcome data on this or any other aspect of the TANF program the way a state-level survey can.

That is why the Casey Foundation and other national funders are prepared to step up and jointly fund this effort and to discuss with you what such a jointly funded program would look like. We are willing to make this \$1 million commitment because we believe in the critical importance of state-specific data designed to help state-level TANF managers and policy-makers. We hope that this analysis is helpful to you. If you or your staff have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience. Again, thank you for this opportunity to share my views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Douglas W. Nelson
President

Copies: Wade Horn