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COMMITTEE ON  
WAYS AND MEANS  
SELECT REVENUE MEASURES  
WORKER AND FAMILY SUPPORT  
OVERSIGHT



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

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April 17, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi,

As you consider additional coronavirus related legislation, I write to urge you to ensure provisions are included to protect the low-income and vulnerable individuals on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a program that, as currently structured, is likely to fail these families during a severe economic downturn such as the one imminent upon our country.

While I believe this program is fundamentally flawed, we can make changes during this time to mitigate some of this program's worst features. I urge you to include in any future bill addressing our country's coronavirus needs a provision requiring the federal government to issue a nationwide waiver against penalties for failing to meet work participation and for other harmful requirements (like enforcing the five year time limit) that would prevent individuals from receiving assistance in the middle of this pandemic. As part of that effort, the legislation should bar any state, during the course of any such waiver, from sanctioning individuals for violations of any waived conditions, including time limits.

Additionally, I urge you to include a TANF emergency fund of at least \$5 billion over two years, similar to the one created in 2009. This fund would provide additional resources for TANF programs that may become overwhelmed as unemployment spikes and potentially millions more Americans become eligible. The need for a TANF emergency fund that would prioritize basic cash assistance, emergency funds for rent, transportation, and food, and support for subsidized employment and job training to help workers get back into the workforce is looming. As part of the recovery, the economy may not add jobs back as fast as it shed them. Encouraging subsidized jobs through TANF a win-win. It is estimated that the ARRA TANF emergency fund helped create 250,000 jobs. Congress should recreate this successful program as part of our efforts to help workers return to the workforce, especially low-income families that already face enough barriers.

I furthermore urge you to include language ending the TANF ban for formerly incarcerated individuals. Those who have completed their sentences should be able to get the help they need to restart or rebuild their lives. Such restrictions unfairly prevent vulnerable citizens from

accessing critically needed stabilizing supports during this national emergency. These benefits are vital to efforts to transition back into the community and to get back on one's feet and lead upstanding lives. This ban is a relic that must be repealed.

I know I do not have to tell you that our country is going through trying times. Thousands of Americans have already lost their lives and millions remain at risk. Our economy is being battered and low-income families are the most at risk.

Unfortunately, TANF, as a block grant, is designed in a way that makes it unresponsive and unsuitable in this time of massive economic disruption. Unlike other programs such as SNAP, TANF benefits do not ebb and flow on the basis of economic need. And at a time when unemployment is spiking to record rates, state TANF programs are poorly positioned to respond.

As currently structured, TANF programs are nearly solely defined by work requirements and inflexible time limits. Furthermore, TANF funding has been capped since its creation in 1996, proving woefully inadequate in tough economic times when keeping or finding a job becomes impossible and eligibility for the program rises.

In the last four weeks, 22 million Americans have filed unemployment claims—the largest spike since the Department of Labor began compiling this data. Over 700,000 jobs were lost last month which is likely just the tip of an historic job loss iceberg. It is safe to say that many more families and individuals are at risk as our economy undergoes a sudden and unprecedented disruption.

It is critical that during this time we stop TANF's harmful work requirements, punitive time limits, and harmful exclusions that will only further worsen the well-being of those who will suffer the most from the effects of this downturn. It is simply unfair to punish people for jobs they lost (or cannot find) through no fault of their own. While some federal guidance has been issued, it falls far short of what is needed.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gwen S. Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gwen" being more prominent and the last name "Moore" following in a similar style.

Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress