

July 14, 2012

Dear Governor Mike Beebe,

State Senator Gilbert Baker,

State Senator Jason Rapert

State Representative David Meeks,

As duly elected officials, I wanted to take this time to write to you concerning President Obama's recent decision to provide waivers to states in regards to the federal welfare program; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

As a citizen of Conway, Arkansas for the last five years, I have become deeply involved in working with families who participate in TANF. In 2007 and in 2009, I started a local church and founded a nonprofit respectively that seeks to address individuals, families and communities that are considered in poverty. I have also seen and I am now seeing in greater numbers, men and women who are receiving such assistance and for a number of reasons are not willing to be vigorous in their search for employment. The most recurring comment that I hear is that if a person is no longer receiving TANF, then they will not qualify for other types of government aid. This is disturbing and disheartening.

My desire is that they would not be on such programs. My hope and prayer is that they would discover their unique gifts and be contributors to our city and state in God glorifying ways.

The *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* signed by President Clinton was a step in the right direction of limiting the amount of time an individual could receive such benefits. In our own state, *the Administration for Children and Families* that provides oversight for TANF reports that in FY 2011, Arkansas averaged 18,437 recipients.¹ In 2010 the FY average was 19,488. Those are steps in the right direction.

It would now appear that President Obama seeks to undo such efforts through a Section 1115 waiver process. In the memorandum published by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, it is stated,

“While the TANF work participation requirements are contained in section 407, section 402(a)(1)(A)(iii) requires that the state plan “[e]nsure that parents and caretakers receiving assistance under the program engage in work activities in accordance with section 407.” Thus, HHS has authority to waive compliance with *this 402 requirement and authorize a state to test approaches and methods other than those set forth in section 407, including definitions of work activities and engagement, specified limitations, verification procedures, and the calculation of participation rates* (emphasis mine). As described below, however, HHS will only consider

¹ Case Load Data 2011, *Arkansas Children and Families*, prepared April 3, 2012.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/caseload/2011/2011_recipient_tan.htm

approving waivers relating to the work participation requirements that make changes intended to lead to more effective means of meeting the work goals of TANF.”²

Since this waiver can be sought by states to “test approaches and methods,” I would implore you gentleman not to deviate from the time limits set on individuals that are outlined in the legislation of 1996.

I have seen and heard with my own eyes and ears, the mindset of men and women who are determined to simply “draw a check.” Individuals that remain on welfare are not able to meet all of their required needs. In a given month, men, women and families are still short on rent, groceries and utilities. This is a reality that is rarely reported. Yet there is opportunity present in this situation.

Arkansas must seek better ways to move families from government dependence to self-sufficiency. Arkansas must seek to be a leader in creating reform that reduces the amount of federal dollars coming into our state, because men and women are getting back to work and providing for their families and stimulating the Arkansas economy. The best solution for men and women in poverty is to secure the new skills, discipline and opportunities to have a solid wage earning job. This will require tougher decisions not only for men and women in poverty but also for the men and women who represent us.

What opportunities are before us? Let me begin by saying that humans are designed to work. God created the universe and then he created man to continue that reflection of work which occurred in six days. Work from the beginning was and is to be a benefit not only to creation but humanity as a whole. When more men and women are working, families are blessed, communities thrive and our state advances.

So I conclude this open letter with recommendation. These are solutions that come from a compilation of men and women I have met over the years who simply want a chance.

As the state’s executive officer and legislators please consider:

- Tax credits for small and large businesses who will hire individuals who are TANF recipients
- Reduce the per credit cost of 2 year state funded colleges to match the award received from the Arkansas State Lottery Scholarship
- Encourage banks to create a program for TANF recipients who will develop a business plan, present that plan to bank officers and that bank will offer a 1% or zero percent loan to launch that business in the community
- Maintain the two year ceiling as outlined in the original 1996 legislation

Gentleman, thank you for taking time to hear my concerns and recommendations. Please remember above all else that you are servants whom God has placed in your respective positions to represent the

² Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Information Memorandum, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Family Assistance, July 12, 2012. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/policy/im-ofa/2012/im201203/im201203.html>

people of Arkansas. Please represent the poor of our state by creating for them an environment where they have the opportunity to flourish as those who are not in their economic position.

Sincerely,

Phillip D. Fletcher