



COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

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August 29, 2003

Senator Charles E. Grassley
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
135 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

Soon the Senate Finance Committee will consider a critical piece of legislation, one that deeply affects millions of Americans, TANF reauthorization.

I write to you as president of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the largest Catholic lay organization in the United States. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of your vote on this matter, for the future of TANF will determine to a large degree the future for so many poor and under-privileged people in your district and across the country.

Our Society, with over one hundred thousand volunteers in almost every state, serves the poor on a daily basis by providing material and spiritual assistance in many different ways. Our members know the poor, we visit their homes and hear their stories first-hand. While we are not naïve and understand that some people make poor choices and are largely responsible for their plight, we also know that most poor people are so because they have been made poor. You and your colleagues on the committee and in the senate itself have the opportunity to open doors and create opportunities for those who wish to change the course of their lives.

As an organization created precisely to work with the poor, and after careful consideration of the many complicated issues involved in TANF, we have concluded that the following nine items are crucial for the success of this legislation.

1. Benefit eligibility must be restored to legal immigrants.
2. The 30-hour workweek must not be increased.
3. Mothers of children under 6-years-old should be allowed the 20 hours/week standard.
4. States should be given the flexibility to offer TANF recipients 2 years of education and training, with a goal of better jobs and eventual self-sufficiency.
5. Childcare for low-income families should be increased by (at least) the \$5.5 billion the committee proposed last year.
6. The Transitional Medical Assistance should be extended for 5 years for families leaving welfare.
7. Additional funding is needed to support voluntary programs that promote healthy marriage and address domestic violence.

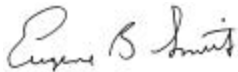
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8. States should be required to eliminate policies that make it difficult for 2-parent families to receive TANF.
9. Family cap laws that deny benefits following the birth of a child should be ended.

Senator Grassley, it has been said that the moral test of government is how it treats those in the dawn of life, the children, those in the twilight of life, the aged, and those in the shadows of life, the needy and underprivileged. You and your colleagues have a unique opportunity before you: to provide opportunities, otherwise non-existent, to so many deserving citizens living in the shadows of the wealthiest nation on earth. If we all feel the effects of a sluggish economy, many in our midst cannot provide for even their own, or their families', most essential needs.

We in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul pray that you will use your place on the Senate Finance Committee to urge re-authorization of a TANF bill that includes the points outlined above.

Sincerely,



Eugene B. Smith
National President, Council of the United States