

Earlier this week, our Department took action to make programs that help Americans find and keep a job even stronger.

The new steps we have taken will give states more flexibility in how they operate the Temporary Assistance to Need Families program. And the steps we have taken were specifically requested by states led by officials from both parties.

When the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program was established as part of welfare reform in the 1990s, it was intended to give states flexibility to design effective programs to help parents move from welfare to work. Today, however, Federal rules dictate mind-numbing details about how to run a welfare-to-work program. Most States and experts agree that these aren't helpful.

Here's one example: under current TANF rules, many states report that their caseworkers are spending more time complying with federal documentation requirements than helping parents find jobs. We need state workers spending less time filling out data reports and more time helping parents find employment.

The new policy we announced will allow states to test new, more effective ways to help parents successfully prepare for, find, and retain employment. States can apply for waivers of federal requirements that get in their way. These waiver applications will be available for public review.

This new flexibility will strengthen welfare reform rules and the effectiveness of state efforts to connect families with work. Waivers that weaken or undercut welfare reform will not be approved. Waivers that seek to avoid time limits or other federal restrictions on when assistance may be provided will not be approved.

We will consider a range of models to increase employment and put more people back to work. For example, states could align and better coordinate employment programs for low-income parents funded by Department of Health and Human Services with workforce training programs funded by the federal Department of Labor.

And we will hold states accountable. States will be required to put in place a federally-approved evaluation and interim performance targets that ensure an immediate focus on measurable outcomes. Their performance in meeting these benchmarks will be publicly available, so everyone can evaluate how states are doing. If states are not meeting their performance targets, their authority to test new ideas will be terminated.

We are adopting this policy after we received requests for more flexibility in the TANF program from a number of states, and received inquiries about waivers from Utah, Nevada, California, Connecticut, and Minnesota. We expect that these efforts will help more parents find jobs and provide for their children.

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