



Minnesota NOW

CANDIDATE BRIEFING

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MINNESOTA NOW'S POSITION ON WELFARE/PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

At the 1993 national conference, NOW adopted a resolution that state and national PAC's will not endorse any candidate who supports punitive welfare reform. Here is the text of that resolution:

Be it resolved that NOW will not endorse or support any candidate for political office who supports any welfare provision which will reduce or withhold benefits from any individual based on number of children, marital status, sexual orientation, age, or ability to work outside of the home.

The legislative position of the Minnesota chapter of NOW on welfare is as follows:

MN NOW supports legislation designed to eliminate the feminization of poverty . . . by ensuring that all welfare programs encourage the economic independence, privacy, choice, and dignity of the recipients; (and) by ensuring that all welfare programs are based on a standard of need which included an automatic standard of living increase and child care.

MN NOW opposes mandatory "workfare" or work in exchange for a stipend; and opposes punitive sanctioning of welfare participants. MN NOW opposes supplanting state money with federal welfare money, resulting in an overall reduction in the amount of money spent on programs to assist people out of poverty.

One item of particular confusion is that of "**workfare**": requiring welfare recipients to work in order to receive benefits. Because our society expects people to work for a living and parenting is not viewed as work, the idea of workfare is attractive to many people who have not examined it carefully.

NOW opposes "workfare" for several reasons:

1. **Workfare masks the real problems without addressing them.** Two main reasons women are on public assistance are lack of living wage jobs available to them and an overall social policy of having women care for children without adequate resources or compensation.
2. **Workfare is harmful to women and their children.** Cash and food benefits under the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) are only 66% of the poverty level. Women on public assistance often have a hard time doing much more than meeting the basic needs of their families. Searching food shelves and other charities for needed items, dealing with landlords and bill collectors, getting children to doctors and dentists, and dealing with the welfare bureaucracy consume huge amounts of time and energy. Forcing a mother to work even 20 hours a week may mean that the family doesn't get enough to eat, that the mother is totally exhausted and has no time to focus on parenting her children, that the family loses their housing and becomes homeless, and more.

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3. **It makes it more difficult for many families to get off public assistance.** Parents on public assistance have less time for job seeking and education that might help them get off and stay off welfare. This phenomenon has been documented in several states where workfare has been implemented, in that recipients stay on welfare longer and have lower incomes over a period of time than other recipients.
4. **People who have to work in order to retain public assistance benefits would be much more vulnerable to harassment and other on-the-job mistreatment.** Minimum wage workers who face sexual harassment or hazardous working conditions but choose not to pursue a lengthy and costly legal battle at least have public assistance to turn to. The pressure not to complain in order to keep public assistance would be enormous.
5. **The creation of a new low-wage workforce would remove incentives for the creation of living wage jobs.**

NOW also opposes:

- ▶ Time limits on receiving benefits.
- ▶ Limiting benefits for additional children born while parents are receiving public assistance.
- ▶ Vendor payments.
- ▶ Withholding of benefits due to children's school absence.
- ▶ Fingerprinting of recipients.
- ▶ Welfare reforms that coerce women to get married, use contraceptives, or be sterilized.
- ▶ Any other reforms whose intent or effect is to punish or control women's behaviors or push women and children deeper into poverty.

NOW supports measures that will assist but not force women off welfare. These include:

- ▶ Higher benefits (bringing recipients at least up to poverty level).
- ▶ Wider availability of sliding-fee child care.
- ▶ Universal health care coverage.
- ▶ A higher minimum wage.
- ▶ Creating more living wage jobs.
- ▶ Improved child support guidelines, awards, and enforcement.
- ▶ Allowing education as an alternative to work requirements.
- ▶ Improved access to education and job placement.
- ▶ Improved access to family planning services.
- ▶ Wider availability of subsidized or other affordable housing.
- ▶ Pay equity.
- ▶ Affirmative action.
- ▶ More transitional support for women leaving domestic abuse situations.
- ▶ Other measures that boost women's abilities to provide for themselves and their families.

For more information on NOW's positions on legislative issues, call or write Minnesota NOW.

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