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Fighting for a living wage

On March 29 as the Senate resumed its debate about further welfare reform, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) introduced an amendment to increase the federal minimum wage. Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) objected, arguing that this amendment was not "germane" to welfare reauthorization.

Not germane? A June 2003 study in Illinois revealed that 90 percent of those who left our state's welfare rolls for work live below the federal poverty level. Only 6 percent of those who found work got good jobs -- jobs that paid \$8 or more per hour, offered benefits, and were full-time. Kennedy's effort to increase the minimum wage is not only germane to welfare reform, it is essential if our aim is to decrease dependence on government through work!

The Senate will also debate an amendment to expand from 12 to 24 months the time a [welfare] recipient can engage in vocational education. Good jobs in a global economy demand a skilled work force. The Senate would be wise to recognize the pertinence of this amendment, too.

Rose Karasti,

senior policy associate

Chicago Jobs Council