

As printed in the Chicago Sun-Times, February 24, 2003

Welfare reform helps no one

While the Bush Administration prepares for war with Iraq, its pre-emptive strikes on social programs for low-income families in this country continues with a bomb of a welfare bill.

As the Sun-Times reported on February 14 ["House OKs New Welfare Reform"], the Republican- controlled U.S. House passed the administration-supported welfare bill. The bill ignores reams of research on welfare reform's real successes and remaining challenges.

With national unemployment numbers exceeding 8 million people, this bill ties assistance to needy families to 40 hours of narrowly defined work activities and eliminates options for education and training that lead to higher wage jobs in an increasingly high-skilled labor market.

As states nationwide reel under staggering deficits, it burdens them with requirements for greater caseload work participation without providing adequate funds for work supports like child care, health care, housing, and transportation.

And with a new mandate to sanction entire families, it punishes children whose parents are not skilled enough, not healthy enough, not main-stream enough, or not callous enough to comply with the new requirements, secure employment, or celebrate the job or "make work" placement that keeps them at the poverty level.

Research confirms that programs that mix work and training improve wage, job-benefit, and retention outcomes for welfare-to-work recipients. Additionally, those states most successful at helping people get jobs, and keeping them at work, invested significantly in critical work supports.

Families in poverty are not the enemy. Let's hope the Senate will heed the research and produce a welfare bill that supports families struggling to sustain themselves and prepares them for viable employment in their local labor markets.

*Rose Karasti
Senior Policy Associate
Chicago Jobs Council*