



Missouri
Catholic
Conference

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MCC Urges Personal Approach to Welfare Reform that Gives Recipients Time to Start a New Life

March 20, 2015 JEFFERSON CITY, MO—The Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) is urging state lawmakers to pass welfare reform that will help poor families lift themselves out of poverty. Mike Hoey, the Executive Director of the MCC, believes legislation currently being considered by the Missouri General Assembly has the potential to help poor families if the measure allows recipients adequate time to participate in support services such as job training and education.

Senate Bill 24, sponsored by State Senator David Sater (R-Mt. Vernon), would make changes to the temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) program. Different versions of the bill have passed the Missouri Senate and House, and those differences will need to be resolved before a bill is sent to Governor Nixon for his consideration.

TANF provides cash assistance to poor families. To be eligible a mother with two children must have a monthly income of no more than \$292 a month. “These are the poorest of the poor,” said Hoey. “To help them out of poverty is a challenge but it is challenge worth taking.”

As SB 24 has made it ways through the Missouri General Assembly, the MCC has obtained a number of changes to create a more effective and personalized TANF program. The bill now requires face-to-face meetings with caseworkers where recipients sign a personal responsibility pact and develop a plan to move out of poverty. “It’s similar to the personal ‘hands on’ approach that pregnancy resource centers take in helping women in crisis pregnancies,” Hoey said.

According to Hoey, however, there is one big problem with SB 24 that needs to be corrected. As passed by the House, TANF recipients can receive no more than 30 months of benefits in their entire lifetime. According to Hoey, this lifetime limit is too short. “Legislators need to recognize that it takes time to help people turn their lives around. These parents face serious barriers to employment. They lack transportation and education, many have few job skills, some have been the victims of domestic violence, and some are trying to overcome alcohol and drug addictions.”

The Senate version of SB 24 is much better, according to Hoey. It sets the lifetime benefit limit at 48 months. “This is much more reasonable,” Hoey said. “It gives recipients time to fully participate in the required TANF activities such as job training, additional education, as well as community service and part-time employment that could lead to a full time job.”

The MCC has also convinced lawmakers to improve TANF by putting more focus on preventing out of wedlock births, as well as encouraging marriage and the formation of two parent families. “The lack of strong families is at the root of many of our social ills like poverty. We need to do more to promote two-parent families and SB 24 can start this process,” Hoey said.

As passed by the House, SB 24 allocates \$4.3 million for programs that promote healthy marriages and two parent families. It also allocates \$4.3 million for alternative to abortion services. “This is federal money, already available, that can greatly improve Missouri’s TANF program,” said Hoey.

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The Bishops of Missouri, speaking together on matters of public policy, form the Missouri Catholic Conference