



July 29, 2015

Rep. Charles Boustany, Chairman
Rep. Lloyd Doggett, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means
1129 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Boustany and Ranking Member Doggett,

On behalf of the more than 170,000 bipartisan members and supporters, over 1,000 branches, and 800 college and university partners, of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I would like to thank you for accepting comments on welfare reform proposals including the committee discussion draft on reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

AAUW believes increased access to education and training programs are necessary for all women to become self-sufficient, attain jobs that pay a living wage, and move permanently off welfare. AAUW supports policies which provide long-term solutions to economic inequity, such as providing women and girls with access to education and job training. We are gratified to see that the committee's discussion draft to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program includes extending lifetime limits on individuals' participation in vocational education training, and considers lifting statutory caps on the percentage of individuals in education and training that may be counted toward state work participation rates. These policy proposals have the potential to ensure that more women are able to move from welfare to well-paying, economically secure careers.

Statistics show that educational access is closely linked to economic security. Education and training improve employability for women and helps their families become financially empowered and economically self-sufficient. Information from the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau shows that the higher a person's educational attainment, the more likely they are to be a labor force participant. In 2014, the reported labor force participation rates by educational attainment for women ages 25 years and over were:

- less than a high school diploma—31.9 percent
- high school diploma—48.6 percent
- some college, or associate degree —61.8 percent
- bachelor's degree and higher—70.8 percent.¹

With the completion of high school and some higher education, the poverty rate for women declines from around 31 percent to around 13 percent.² Additionally, completion of a college degree can dramatically improve outcomes for families on welfare. Median annual earnings for women without a high school degree are less than half of those with a college degree.³

Since welfare reform began in the 1990's, culminating in the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996, the elevation of "work first" strategies has meant that fewer and fewer individuals can successfully enroll in education while receiving public assistance.

Reauthorization of TANF in 2005 did little to open doors for training and education that lead to sustainable careers for women on welfare. Although regulations promulgated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2006 allowed for more types of education to count toward work participation rate requirements and permitted some unsupervised homework time to be counted toward those time thresholds, more needs to be done to ensure that individuals are encouraged to pursue higher education, vocational education, and job training.

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) has found that welfare reform has decreased the probability of both high school and college attendance among young adult women by 20-25 percent.[iv] This must be remedied. The same NBER report explains that while the “work first” policies may not have been explicitly aimed at limiting education, they nevertheless significantly and negatively affect the education attainment of program participants. Welfare’s focus on work must also include training and education to limit these unintended and undermining consequences.

AAUW strongly believes that welfare programs should be flexible to allow participants to aim for the highest level of education possible, because higher education promotes economic security and helps to ensure that women are not locked into low-wage jobs. As welfare reform proposals are considered in Congress, AAUW will continue to push to increase education and job training programs for women. If you have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Anne Hedgepeth, government relations manager, at 202/785-7724.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Vice President of Government Relations

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014). Current Population Survey, 2014 annual averages (unpublished tables).

www.dol.gov/wb/stats/laborforce_participation_rate_edu_race_hisp_2014.txt.htm

² U.S. Census Bureau. 2013 American Community Survey factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/13_1YR/S1501

³ U.S. Census Bureau. 2013 American Community Survey factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/13_1YR/S1501