

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Susan Davis
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
“Strengthening Access and Accountability to Work in Welfare Programs”
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
March 15, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.

Thank you Chair Guthrie for calling this hearing today.

As our Committee begins to discuss welfare, or specifically, work support programs, we must remember these programs don't serve nameless, faceless numbers. They serve our nation's working class--thousands of American families who are struggling to make ends meet. We must be willing to help these working families. Not kick them as they are down, as they struggle to lift themselves up and find economic security. Unfortunately, this is exactly what the expansion of work requirements would be doing.

I am concerned that when we talk about “welfare to work,” we are perpetuating an outdated, baseless myth that people who receive benefits are not working. The research shows that most low-income people on these programs are already working. We must dispel another myth here: the false assumption that getting people into a job will in-and-of-itself going lift them out of poverty.

Today, we see that the nature of work has changed. Low-income workers face poverty-level wages. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25, which is below the national poverty level for a family of three. Many workers face highly unpredictable, unstable schedules, which dramatically affect their earnings. They earn few to no benefits in their low-wage jobs. And as a result, these working families find themselves increasingly reliant on low-income work support programs because their jobs do not support their basic needs. Programs like SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid actually support working low-income people, by helping them put food on the table and access health coverage.

But if we expand work requirements to new programs like Medicaid, or expand them within existing programs, they will only make it harder for working families to access this critical help. Analysis after analysis has found that, in most cases, work requirements do not increase stable employment, and when there is an increase, it is insignificant and small. Even with work requirements, most recipients remained poor.

We need to have a discussion about how we can better serve our families in poverty. Workforce development services, as we know from past outcomes, play a critical role in helping to successfully move people into better jobs. Yet over the past few decades, there has been a steady decline in investments made to our nation's workforce development system. [Short sentence about current programs' inaccessibility.] TANF is only serving 23 out of every 100 families in poverty. We must and can do better.

We will hear today from state representatives who are working to better integrate their Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs with programs like TANF and SNAP. I do believe with better coordination, we can better serve our nation's working families. However, I am very concerned that all too often, a call to increase coordination simply means consolidating and

restricting access to needed benefits. We see this happening in some states already– consolidation is leading to fewer families being served.

We have to remember that while TANF, WIOA, SNAP and Medicaid should work in tandem, they each ultimately serve very different purposes. And the supports these programs provide together are powerful tools for lifting working families out of poverty. Taking away these supports does not help a person get a job, access training, or gain higher wages, any faster.

After passing a huge tax cut for America's wealthiest one percent, I hope we can have a genuine and long overdue conversation about how to best help our nation's working class.