



Missouri Senate Passes Welfare Reform Bill

By Rudy Takala

February 25, 2015

A bill passed by the Missouri Senate would add new eligibility and work requirements for recipients of federal welfare benefits. If passed into law, Missouri would join 37 other states requiring welfare recipients to obtain some form of employment, in order to receive assistance.

State Sen. David Sater (R-Cassville) says the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) welfare program is not temporary for many people.

“Currently, the way things are, a person can apply for TANF benefits for their family, and not participate in any work activity at all,” he said. “‘Work activity’ definitions are lots of different activities... whether you’re going to a college or a technical school, or you’re searching for a job or doing community service, or you’re actually working somewhere.”

Returning to Work

“Missouri has been very relaxed in enforcing work activity requirements. What my bill does, right off the bat, is says ‘you cannot even apply for TANF benefits unless you are performing a work activity of at least 30 hours per week,’” Sater said.

“That changes the whole ballgame around, that changes the way things are being done,” he said.

“It is a very big problem in the state of Missouri. We only had a 14 to 16 percent work activity participation rate. We were the last in the country in our efficiencies for that program, and so I’ve been working on doing something,” Sater said.

‘I Want to See People Going Back to Work’

Sater says he hopes reforming welfare in Missouri will help people become more reliant on themselves, and not on government.

“I want to see people going back to work and more people being less dependent on government for their existence, and I think this bill will go a long way in that direction,” he said.

Cato Institute Senior Fellow Michael Tanner says Sater’s bill is a positive development.

Off of Welfare and Back to Work

“Missouri has one of the lowest work participation rates in the nation for welfare recipients. I think this is clearly a step in the right direction,” he said. “We know that work is the surest route out of poverty. Four percent of full-time workers live below the poverty level. If we can get people into jobs, it’s the surest route for getting them out of poverty long-term.”

Tanner says encouraging people to seek employment or to obtain vocational education will help people individually, in addition to helping them economically.

“Missouri is now putting an emphasis back on work. I think that’s an essential component of any proposal to get people out of poverty,” he said. “Welfare, too often, takes care of people’s material needs, but it doesn’t deal with the fact that it doesn’t help them become self-supporting, or help them become independent.”

“Only work can do that,” Tanner said.