

July 20, 2011

<http://detroitnews.com/article/20110720/OPINION01/107200321>

Editorial: Fair welfare for Michigan

Four-year benefits will still help families in need and give taxpayers a break

THE DETROIT NEWS

The Michigan Senate voted last week to place limits on welfare, which would make it one of the stricter states on welfare in the Midwest. While opponents of limiting welfare say the new law would hurt children and the poor, the state isn't doing these families any favor by keeping them indefinitely on the welfare payroll.

Once the House approves changes made by the Senate, the legislation is off to the governor. Republicans have said Michigan can't afford lifetime welfare benefits, and by placing limits on benefits, the state should save \$77.4 million. Until this change, Michigan was one of the last states in the country with lifetime welfare benefits. Under the new limits, individuals will have a lifetime cap of 48 months, which should be enough time to get families back on their feet. Other changes to the benefits seem reasonable, too.

As Michael Tanner, an expert at the Cato Institute on domestic policies, says, this law will only affect a small group of welfare recipients. Most of those who receive benefits do so for a limited amount of time, such as in the event of a divorce or job loss.

Tanner says the "hardcore" recipients are usually single parents with few job skills and little education. And in Michigan, when welfare is coupled with many other state assistance programs, it's enough to keep such families afloat. Although some, such as Gilda Jacobs of the Michigan League for Human Services, claim that limiting welfare will unfairly punish children, encouraging people to stay on the welfare rolls won't help them in the long run.

Long-term welfare recipients need incentives to get work or training that will land them a job. Leaning on government assistance often passes along to subsequent generations and ultimately traps children in a cycle of poverty. Children who see their parents head off to work — even if it's a low-paying job — learn valuable lessons.

Welfare in Michigan will continue to help the vast majority of individuals who need a temporary safety net. And it will give the rest more motivation to make a better life for their families.

© Copyright 2011 The Detroit News. All rights reserved.