

March 24, 2006 letter - TANF

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The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

The nation's governors look forward to working closely with you to implement changes made by the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Although many of the policy changes under the DRA reflect worthy goals for states, the law's changes could restrict state flexibility, potentially impeding future progress of the TANF program. Our goal is to work with you to ensure regulations promulgated by your department allow states the flexibility needed to build upon our past successes.

As you know, the TANF program is critical to state efforts to assist needy families. To ensure full state input, the National Governors Association (NGA) formed a task force of eight governors to work with your department as it develops regulations. We understand that your regulations will be guided in part by the findings of the August 2005 GAO report, which calls for greater HHS oversight of the TANF program. As the leaders of the NGA TANF task force, we are committed to implementing the new TANF requirements; however, Governors are concerned that the source of TANF's success - flexible, state-specific programs - will be undermined if the new regulations fail to maintain adequate flexibility for states.

The task force worked jointly with the American Public Human Services Association to produce specific recommendations, which are attached to this letter. In general, our recommendations call on HHS to define activities broadly that count towards the TANF participation rate, allow states to establish workable verification systems, and provide realistic timeframes to allow states to make legislative and programmatic changes in a thoughtful and careful manner. In addition, we recommend that HHS take into account the negative impact that restrictive regulations may have on harder-to-serve recipients who may face severe barriers to work. Finally, we encourage HHS to recognize that in meeting new TANF requirements, states must comply with other federal laws including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

Governors are committed to continuing the strong federal-state partnership that began 10 years ago. Working together, we hope to use this opportunity to further improve TANF and meet our shared goal of helping needy families reach self-sufficiency through work.

Your personal involvement in this issue would be most welcome.

Sincerely,

Governor Mike Huckabee
Chairman

Governor Janet Napolitano
Vice Chair

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- [TANF Recommendations](#) (pdf)



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