

# **Testimony for the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means in the U.S. House of Representatives**

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## ***What Will We Know and When Will We Know It?***

Subcommittee members have expressed an interest in learning from the Administration and from state and local administrators about how the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 is being implemented, and from representatives of the U.S. Census Bureau, the Congressional Research Service, HHS/ACF, and the Research Forum, of ways in which Congress can be informed about the effects of recent changes in welfare and related policies.

Certainly, the 1996 statute that created Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and modified many aspects of welfare policy has profound implications for millions of our citizens and immigrant residents.

The statute's thrust to devolve decision-making to state and local levels is stimulating great variation in program design at the state and local levels. The increased requirements for work participation and the imposition of time limits create challenges for state and local staff as well as for the TANF participants. Changes in food stamp and other benefits for immigrant populations are likely to have a huge impact on hundreds of thousands of individuals.

Thus, understanding what information will be available, when it can be obtained, and how it can be accessed is critically important. Congress has a responsibility to govern well for all its citizens. Since welfare participants are among this country's most vulnerable citizens and 8.8 million - or two-thirds - of these participants are children, this subcommittee's concerns about the effects of PRWORA and TANF are commendable.

## **Earlier Relevant Research**

In examining what information will be available, the backdrop of earlier research findings should be kept very much in evidence. This is true for several reasons. First, during the 1980s a significant number of analyses and experiments began to produce information that improved our understanding of the welfare population and the effects of various interventions. Second, findings from this early research constitute a template against which changes produced by PRWORA can be compared. Third, the earlier research findings have frequently raised additional questions that need to be answered in order to make further progress in designing new interventions.

Research accomplishments in the 1980s included analyses of the dynamics of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) population by Bane and Elwood, which provided new information about the heterogeneity of the welfare population and about client characteristics which were correlated with duration in the caseload.

Experiments fielded by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) in eight states studied a range of interventions (i.e. job search, community work experience programs (CWEP), grant diversion, education, training). These projects were rigorously designed using randomized samples to measure the impact of a specific intervention or sequenced combinations of interventions.

The results of the experiments consistently showed modest benefits from modest investments in the tested interventions. Employment and income gains were reported for the experimental groups, along with modest reductions in welfare costs and dependency.

It was also the case that impacts were largest for those least well off. That is, employment and income benefits and welfare savings were greater for members of experimental groups who had the least prior work experience, and lowest grade completion.

The experiments also showed that job search, when well administered (as in Riverside's Greater Avenues for Independence – GAIN – program) could be a very effective intervention for moving participants into the workforce. Education and training require a significant investment over time; thus, impacts were not identified in the near term. Nevertheless, given the very low levels of educational attainment by many welfare participants (a recent national survey shows 64% of welfare recipients not completing high school) and the skill demands of today's workplace, the outcomes achieved in well designed education and training programs like Comprehensive Employment Training (CET) should not be dismissed.

Three earlier experiments have addressed teen parents and dependency. New Chance was designed by MDRC to study the impacts of a comprehensive services intervention on mothers and children. The Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP), an Ohio experiment evaluated by MDRC, provided financial incentives and disincentives based on the teen parent's school attendance. The Teen Parent Demonstration (TPD), evaluated by Mathematica, imposed mandates on teen participants that triggered financial sanctions for non-compliance.

A comprehensive review of findings from these three projects, sponsored by the Joint Center on Poverty Research (JCPR), MDRC, Mathematica, and the Research Forum demonstrated the difficulty of making a difference among the teen parent population. While LEAP and TPD produced better school attendance, findings from all three projects were disappointing. Particularly important is evidence in New Chance that obtaining a GED had no effect on subsequent employment and earnings.

Two other experiments are cited because each showed positive impacts for a distinct welfare group. The first, MDRC's Supported Work, was an experiment with structured work experience designed to increase demands on the worker over time. In this experiment, very disadvantaged women who were long term welfare recipients benefited significantly.

The second, the New York Child Assistance Program (NYCAP), evaluated by Abt Associates, Inc. is a program designed to increase income from employment with child support incentives. The women were required to establish paternity as a condition for participation. Employment and income gains as well as savings to the state were significant.

## **Research in the 1990s**

During the 1990s, a new wave of research developed reflecting the interest of many states to institute changes through waiver authority. Authorization of these waivers was granted subject to HHS approval of a rigorous evaluation. Thus, today we are the beneficiaries of a significant number of research projects studying program components — such as time limits, family caps, and financial incentives — now being implemented in new TANF programs.

Most of these more recent research projects are included in a database that has been developed by the Research Forum with support from the Annie E. Casey, Russell Sage, Edna McConnell Clark, and Chase Manhattan Foundations. The Research Forum, hosted at the National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University School of Public Health has three purposes, all relevant to the changes in social policy that we are discussing at this hearing. They are:

- To encourage rigorous, comparable, and policy-relevant research as a means of monitoring and evaluation;
- To promote collaboration among researchers, funders, policymakers, state and local program administrators, and practitioners;
- To facilitate the exchange of research-based information among key stakeholders.

To support the third purpose, a database accessible through an interactive web site — <http://www.researchforum.org> — has been designed to include extensive information about research projects that meet three criteria. They are large scale and frequently multi-site; they have been designed by social scientists who are recognized as having contributed to the field; and they are relevant to TANF. (Other projects not meeting all of these criteria will be included later this year in an abbreviated form.)

Currently, 35 research projects are included in the database (see listing, p.11). Of these, 22 include impact research (see listing, p.12). Twenty-five are implementation studies, 20 of which are linked to impact studies (see listing, p. 13). In addition, the database includes 20 descriptive or analytical studies (see listing, p. 14).

Most important, the research projects in the database can be sorted by components being evaluated. The major components include:

- Changes in Child Support
- Changes in Eligibility
- Educational Activities
- Employment Activities
- Family Caps
- Financial Disincentives/Sanctions
- Food Stamps
- Program operations/implementation
- Program Requirements
- Support Services
- Time Limits

Important information about these components is emerging and will continue to emerge during the next several years. For example, a number of states are testing **time limits**. Early findings from implementation and descriptive/analytical studies in some of these states are already available. Early impact findings are available for sites in Florida, Connecticut, and Delaware; descriptive/analytical studies have been completed in Iowa, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin.

<b>Schedule of Project Reports on Impacts on Time Limits</b>						
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Florida	Interim	Interim	Interim	Final		
Connecticut	Interim	Interim	Interim			Final
Vermont		Interim				Final
Delaware	Interim					

In addition to NYCAP, a number of projects are testing **financial incentives** (see listing, p 15). Of particular interest are Canada’s Self-Sufficiency experiment and Minnesota’s Family Investment Program (MFIP). In both instances, there is an impressive take-up by participants, suggesting that more sophisticated approaches to supplementing wages should be explored. (I stress this because I believe we are all seeking for ways to ensure that working families have sufficient subsistence to provide food, shelter, and clothing for their children.)

Projects in the database may be searched and analyzed according to the program components previously cited, as well as other the other project characteristics, such as the sites studied, outcomes assessed and organizations involved.

## Publications

It is also possible to estimate when specific reports will be published. Here, for example, are projections for reports that researchers have shared with the Research Forum. These projections are entered into the database and currently available through the web site:

### April 1998

- *Canada's Self Sufficiency Project: 18-month Impacts*

### June 1998

- *Evaluation of "To Strengthen Michigan's Families": Sixth Annual Report*
- *Postemployment Services Demonstration: Final Report on Implementation*

### July 1998

- *Canada's Self Sufficiency Project: Report on SSP Plus*

### November 1998

- *Postemployment Services Demonstration: Preliminary Impact Findings*

### December 1998

- *Project on Devolution and Urban Change: Implementation Report on Policies and Practices of Individual Sites*
- *Arizona EMPOWER Process Study: Interim Report*

### January 1999

- *Vermont Welfare Reform Evaluation Project: Final Report*

### June 1999

- *Arizona EMPOWER: Cost-Benefit Analysis Final Report*
- *Evaluation of "To Strengthen Michigan's Families": Seventh Annual Report*

### July 1999

- *Canada's Self Sufficiency Project: 36-month Impacts*

### December 1999

- *Project on Devolution and Urban Change: Early Impact Results, by Site*
- *Project on Devolution and Urban Change: Implementation Follow-up Report, by Site*
- *Project on Devolution and Urban Change: Reports on Ethnographic Reports and Community Institutions, by Site*

### January 2000

- *Evaluation of “To Strengthen Michigan’s Families”: Final Report on Eight Years of Demonstration Operations and Cost-Benefit Study*

### June 2000

- *Evaluation of “To Strengthen Michigan’s Families”: Eighth Annual Report*

### December 2001

- *Project on Devolution and Urban Change: Final Impact Results (Individual and Aggregate)*
- *Arizona EMPOWER Impact Study Draft Report*

### April 2002

- *Arizona EMPOWER Demonstration Final Evaluation Report*
- *Arizona EMPOWER Impact Study Final Report*
- *Arizona EMPOWER Process Study Final Report*

## **Gaps in Current Research**

One aspect of the database that is seldom discussed relates to how it helps to identify gaps in what is being studied on scale. Several areas are quite evident:

Child Outcomes: Children comprise about two-thirds of welfare caseloads, yet welfare research projects have seldom incorporated direct assessments of their well-being. Embedded in MDRC’s National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (formerly JOBS) is an important set of studies on child impacts; one of which is an observational study of parent/child interactions. Results of these studies will be available in about six months.

The Department of Health and Human Services has worked extensively with twelve states to stimulate interest in evaluating child outcomes. Funds have been provided to five of these states to support this work on child outcomes. Much more needs to be done.

Substance Abuse: Currently, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is planning an experiment. This is the single large scale effort planned to examine an intervention for TANF participants who are substance users. Despite generous foundation funding, the sample size of this project will be relatively small, and child outcomes may not be addressed. Yet, we know that individuals abusing drugs comprise one of the most problematic groups in our TANF population and that effects of this parental condition on children should be better understood.

Immigrants: This population is subject to the earliest and most extensive changes, yet only the

Urban Institute's New Federalism project and a few other more modest projects are currently studying impacts related to PRWORA changes.

Rural Issues: While urban areas deserve attention, we also should be studying rural areas, particularly those with high concentrations of population on welfare (i.e. Fresno County, California with 220,000 TANF participants out of 660,000 total population).

Systematic Follow-Up of Those Who Leave the Rolls: Except for the Urban Institute's New Federalism project very little work is being done across states or on a large scale to follow individuals longitudinally. Efforts by individual states and the Hudson Institute in Milwaukee provide only limited information about the effects of exits on children.

## **Areas of Research Development / Research Tools**

Having described in broad strokes what we will know and what we will not know, it is important to examine not only when but how we can learn more.

### **Implementation Studies**

One avenue to understanding what is or is not happening will be to pay attention to implementation studies as they emerge. Frequently we have created strong Federal and state statutes, setting appropriate policy direction, but have failed to see those policies translated into practice. That can be understood, since change is hard to achieve and involves many levels of political structure and of management. Nevertheless, since PRWORA institutes change of a magnitude seldom proposed and since it will influence the lives of so many families, knowing what is and is not being achieved is essential to understanding the end effects.

As identified earlier, some of the implementation studies are part of research projects that also evaluate the impact of specific program components such as time limits and family cap. Such studies can be extraordinarily informative in suggesting ways in which these interventions can be more effectively implemented.

In a few instances, implementation or process research will be differently cast. For instance, the Rockefeller Institute project directed by Richard Nathan is studying the states to identify the degree and nature of change attributable to PRWORA. This work and the work undertaken by the Urban Institute in its New Federalism Project will provide invaluable "advance notice" of what is going on generally, while reflecting the variations that PRWORA encourages.

Implementation studies have in the past been delegated to a lesser status than other types of research. During this period of dynamic change, new value needs to be attached to this genre of research. Important work has been initiated by the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) at the University of Wisconsin to mobilize a diverse and distinguished group of researchers in order to foster attention

on the contributions of well-designed implementation studies during a period when, for instance, creating a controlled experiment is not feasible or when information is needed in the short term.

### **Administrative Data**

In this era of computerized management, it seems clear that some of the most timely and accurate information about PRWORA should come from links between administrative data sets. In some states, this potential is developing very well; in many other states, capacity remains quite weak. (This is one instance in which variation may *not* be desirable.) It is clear that, in order to even partially answer certain basic questions, more extensive data links are needed. A few examples:

- TANF match with Unemployment Insurance (UI) and/or wage reporting systems will identify that portion of the TANF caseload moving into jobs with benefits.
- TANF match with the Internal Revenue Service records would give information on tax paying and income status.
- TANF match with the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) would give information on wage level achieved as well as the EITC supplement.
- TANF match with Child Support Enforcement (CSE) would show whether some custodial parent income is provided to supplement other sources of income.
- TANF match with Medicaid and Food Stamps would show what benefits are continued after termination of cash benefits.
- TANF match with the protective and foster care system would identify problems affecting children (obviously constructed with confidentiality safeguards).

Confidentiality and capacity issues need to be addressed in order to fast-forward the use of administrative data.

### **Large Data Sets**

There are some opportunities to mine the major data sets — for example, the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), Current Population Survey (CPS) — but there may be greater opportunities to examine how these data sets have been constructed and to address issues of sample size within states, coverage of program participation, and assessment of child and family outcomes.

For example, the Census Bureau is extending two existing panels of SIPP in order to monitor the effects on families of the devolution of welfare policy. The result, entitled the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD), is a large, longitudinal, nationally representative survey of program participation over a ten-year period, starting prior to and ending after the enactment of TANF. Attention will be given to measuring the effects of these new policies on the well-being of individual recipients, their families, and their children.

## **Impact Studies**

As a former state administrator and then, subsequently, president at MDRC, I want to make a personal pitch to support impact research, particularly randomized studies. The current ferment *will* settle down; some exemplary initiatives *will* be recognized. These should be tested at the earliest time possible.

My own experience has been that controlled experiments yield far superior information. Future work should foster such rigorous research initiatives.

## **In Conclusion and to Recapitulate**

- First, findings exist from earlier research that create parameters for understanding the degree to which PRWORA has changed the welfare equation. Are the demographics of the TANF population different from those of the AFDC population as analyzed by Bane and Elwood? Do modest investments still produce modest returns? Are TANF strategies able to move individuals with low educational and employment experience into the workforce? Are interventions for teen parents having greater success in achieving employment and earnings than past interventions? How are the long-term participants faring as compared to Supported Work participants? Are financial incentive components continuing to produce positive effects?

Answers to these questions are important and can help us understand the workings of TANF and other PRWORA changes across states and localities.

- Second, there is relevant information emerging from the “waiver experiments.” Implementation and impact findings from these projects should be carefully analyzed to discover the effects of states’ efforts in the early 1990s to test time limits, family caps, financial incentives, school mandates, and other program requirements. These findings will help us understand results that may emerge in other states implementing similar changes.
- Third, there are areas in which research efforts should be expanded. They include: learning more about child outcomes, studying the experience of substance abusers in the TANF program, tracking the impact of PRWORA on the immigrant population, studying implementation issues in rural areas, and assessing the status of those leaving the TANF program.
- Fourth, early information about the systemic effects of PRWORA on state and local policies and program will be available through work at the Rockefeller Institute and the Urban Institute. More attention should be given to fostering such well-designed implementation studies at the state and local levels; these can highlight how well changes are actually implemented.
- Fifth, state capacity to use administrative data is important because these data provide “snapshots” of client well being and allow us to see trends over time. State management information system (MIS) capabilities need to be strengthened and confidentiality issues resolved to enable research that will provide timely and accurate information.

- Sixth, large data sets need to be enhanced so that they are representative of state or local populations and can be usefully mined. The Census Bureau's initiative, the Survey of Program Dynamics, is of particular importance.
- Seventh, impact studies should be encouraged as promising programs emerge, and funds should be provided for their development and execution.

Finally, systematic ways to archive and share information about research initiatives should be fostered. The Welfare Reform Academy at the University of Maryland hosts monthly satellite broadcast conferences on various topics of welfare reform and has convened an expert panel to evaluate current research efforts. The inventory of projects created by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) on behalf of this committee is very useful. The database developed by the Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism is another resource.

But, while facilitating the collection and exchange of research information is critical to providing information, the experience of the Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism during the past fourteen months indicates that much more is needed. There exists many opportunities to improve research design; to facilitate coordination among researchers; and to develop a consensus about research method, terms, and definitions, comparability in research questions, and common outcomes. Most of all, researchers need to be encouraged to address questions of relevance to policy makers and practitioners.

Our ultimate goal should be the ability to provide extensive and understandable information to policymakers like yourselves, to other researchers, to practitioners, to funders, and to the media. Knowledge is power — in this instance, the power to make informed decisions.

## PROJECT LIST

TITLE	EVALUATOR
A Better Chance Evaluation	Abt
Alabama ASSETS Evaluation	Abt
Arizona EMPOWER Welfare Reform Demonstration	Abt
Assessing the New Federalism	Urban Institute
Big Cities Confront the New Politics of Child and Family Policy	Columbia SSW
Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project	SDRC
Confronting the New Politics of Child and Family Policy in the U.S.	Columbia SSW
Connecticut's Job's First: Welfare Reform Evaluation Project	MDRC
Devolution of Welfare: Assessing Children's Changing Environments and Effects on School Readiness	Yale
Devolution, Welfare Reform, and Wellbeing Study	Columbia SSW
Florida Family Transition Program (FTP) Evaluation	MDRC
Fragile Families Project	Columbia/Princeton
GAIN Evaluation	MDRC
Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan (LBP) Evaluation	Mathematica
JOBS-PLUS Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families	MDRC
LEAP Evaluation	MDRC
Minnesota's Family Investment Program (MFIP) Evaluation	MDRC
Monitoring States' Welfare Reforms	GAO
National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (formerly JOBS)	MDRC
New Chance Demonstration	MDRC
New Hope Project	MDRC
New York Child Assistance Program (NYCAP) Evaluation	Abt
Newark Young Family Study (sub-study of Teenage Parent Demonstration Program)	Columbia/NCCP
Parents' Fair Share Demonstration	MDRC
Postemployment Services Demonstration	Mathematica
Project on Devolution and Urban Change	MDRC
State Capacity Study	Rockefeller Inst.
State Policies and Practices Regarding Substance Abuse, Medicaid, and the Employment Needs of Welfare Recipients	CASA
State Policy Documentation Project	CBPP
Substance Abuse, Economic Self-Sufficiency, and Welfare Reform	CASA
Teenage Parent Demonstration Program	Mathematica
To Strengthen Michigan's Families (TSMF) Evaluation	Abt
Vermont Welfare Restructuring Project Evaluation	MDRC
Welfare Reform and the Well-Being of Children and Families: A Multi-City Study	U Chicago
Welfare Reform: States' Early Experiences with Benefit Termination	GAO

**PROJECT LIST**  
*Impact Studies*

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>EVALUATOR</b>
A Better Chance Evaluation	Abt
Alabama ASSETS Evaluation	Abt
Arizona EMPOWER Welfare Reform Demonstration	Abt
Assessing the New Federalism	Urban Institute
Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project	SDRC
Connecticut's Job's First: Welfare Reform Evaluation Project	MDRC
Florida Family Transition Program	MDRC
GAIN Evaluation	MDRC
JOBS-PLUS Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families	MDRC
LEAP Evaluation	MDRC
Minnesota's Family Investment Program (MFIP) Evaluation	MDRC
National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (formerly JOBS)	MDRC
New Chance Demonstration	MDRC
New Hope Project	MDRC
New York Child Assistance Program (NYCAP) Evaluation	Abt
Parents' Fair Share Demonstration	MDRC
Postemployment Services Demonstration	Mathematica
Project on Devolution and Urban Change	MDRC
Substance Abuse, Economic Self-Sufficiency, and Welfare Reform	CASA
Teenage Parent Demonstration Program	Mathematica
To Strengthen Michigan's Families (TSMF) Evaluation	Abt
Vermont Welfare Restructuring Project Evaluation	MDRC

**PROJECT LIST**  
*Implementation Studies*

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>EVALUATOR</b>
A Better Chance Evaluation*	Abt
Alabama ASSETS Evaluation*	Abt
Arizona EMPOWER Welfare Reform Demonstration*	Abt
Assessing the New Federalism	Urban Institute
Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project*	SDRC
Connecticut's Job's First: Welfare Reform Evaluation Project*	MDRC
GAIN Evaluation*	MDRC
Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan (LBP) Evaluation	Mathematica
JOBS-PLUS Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families*	MDRC
LEAP Evaluation*	MDRC
Minnesota's Family Investment Program (MFIP) Evaluation*	MDRC
Monitoring States' Welfare Reforms	GAO
National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (formerly JOBS)*	MDRC
New Chance Demonstration*	MDRC
New Hope Project*	MDRC
New York Child Assistance Program (NYCAP) Evaluation*	Abt
Parents' Fair Share Demonstration*	MDRC
Postemployment Services Demonstration*	Mathematica
Project on Devolution and Urban Change*	MDRC
State Capacity Study	Rockefeller Inst.
Substance Abuse, Economic Self-Sufficiency, and Welfare Reform*	CASA
Teenage Parent Demonstration Program *	Mathematica
To Strengthen Michigan's Families (TSMF) Evaluation*	Abt
Vermont Welfare Restructuring Project Evaluation*	MDRC
Welfare Reform and the Well-Being of Children and Families: A Multi-City Study	U Chicago

Projects marked with "\*" are linked to impact studies.

**PROJECT LIST**  
*Descriptive Studies*

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>EVALUATOR</b>
A Better Chance Evaluation	Abt
Assessing the New Federalism	Urban Institute
Big Cities Confront the New Politics of Child and Family Policy	Columbia SSW
Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project	SDRC
Confronting the New Politics of Child and Family Policy in the U.S.	Columbia SSW
Devolution of Welfare: Assessing Children's Changing Environments and Effects on School Readiness	Yale
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State Policy Documentation Project	CBPP
Teenage Parent Demonstration Program	Mathematica
Welfare Reform and the Well-Being of Children and Families: A Multi-City Study	U Chicago
Welfare Reform: States' Early Experiences with Benefit Termination	GAO

**PROJECT LIST**  
*Projects Studying Financial Incentives*

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>EVALUATOR</b>
A Better Chance Evaluation	Abt
Alabama ASSETS Evaluation	Abt
Arizona EMPOWER Welfare Reform Demonstration	Abt
Assessing the New Federalism	Urban Institute
Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project	SDRC
Confronting the New Politics of Child and Family Policy in the United States	Columbia SSW
Connecticut's Job's First: Welfare Reform Evaluation Project	MDRC
Florida Family Transition Program (FTP) Evaluation	MDRC
GAIN Evaluation	MDRC
JOBS-PLUS Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families	MDRC
LEAP Evaluation	MDRC
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