

December 2, 2005

Honorable Jennifer Granholm
Office of the Governor
State Capitol Building
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Granholm:

We are writing in response to your comments earlier this week regarding institution of a time limit on cash assistance benefits in Michigan as part of the welfare reform legislation under consideration by the legislature. We were deeply disappointed to hear that you would support this policy change.

Since enactment of sweeping federal welfare legislation in 1997 that included a 60 month time limit on receipt of federal benefits, Michigan's policy has been to maintain the cash assistance safety net that is critical for extremely poor families, provided that they are meeting state and federal work requirements. This contract with low-income parents has ensured that very poor children in our state are not completely destitute and at great risk as a result of changes in Michigan's economy, or as a result of the difficulties their parents face in competing in today's labor market.

Time limits on receipt of cash assistance in Michigan would place at least 36,000 children at significant risk if their parents could not successfully exit the public welfare system in 48 months, as is currently proposed. You articulated this very danger when the House proposed these restrictive time limits as an alternative to your Executive Budget recommendations earlier in the year. Your administration advocated aggressively against adoption of such policies.

While there appears to be some confusion about whether the target of these proposals are "able-bodied adults", it should be noted that in 1991, after a protracted debate, Michigan terminated cash assistance benefits to over 80,000 recipients of state-funded General Assistance considered to be able-bodied—single adults and couples without children. Over 40 percent of these recipients were women—primarily displaced homemakers whose youngest child had reached the age of 18, making the parent no longer eligible for what was then Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC). The only persons who might currently be considered able-bodied adults who receive cash assistance payments are the parents of children, primarily single mothers, who themselves face staggering obstacles as they strive to support their children and become economically self-sufficient.

Unfortunately, absent physical or mental disabilities, or responsibility for disabled or sick children, these mothers, despite many other barriers, are perceived to be able-bodied by the vast majority of citizens.

(Cont.)

Your statements this week have severely hindered our advocacy efforts as we seek to protect the safety and dignity of the vulnerable families you also have committed to protect. The welfare changes being considered by the legislature are progressing very rapidly. We urge you to examine carefully the policies being debated and make it very clear to those in the legislature who seek punitive approaches to changes in our welfare system that this is not the appropriate course for Michigan.

Respectfully,

Cass Corridor Neighborhood Development Corporation
Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health
Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education
Michigan Catholic Conference
Michigan Coalition for Children and Families
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health
Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency
Michigan Fair Budget Action Coalition
Michigan League for Human Services
Michigan Legal Services
Michigan Welfare Rights Organization
Michigan's Children
St. Vincent Catholic Charities
United Community Housing Coalition
Westside Mothers Welfare Rights Organization