Please Note: Due to recent tragic events, Congress has delayed consideration of many of the bills and issues related to welfare and child support policy. We will report in this issue on information currently available, but will update on the status of legislation and hearings as things change in the next issue. Our thoughts and condolences to any readers directly affected by the September 11 hijackings.

On July 27, the House Agriculture Committee passed H.R. 2646, *The Farm Security Act of 2001*, known as the “Farm Bill” by voice vote. On September 10, the bill was placed on the House calendar. The bill includes reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program. Provisions specific to food stamps include:

- States would be allowed to provide 6 months of transitional food stamp benefits for families leaving TANF.
- A $10 million-per-year program would be established for states to develop and implement simplified application and eligibility determination systems.
- Changes to the quality control program would be made that would result in fewer penalties to states for errors made in determining eligibility for food stamps.
- The food stamp standard deduction, currently set at $134 per month, would be increased based on household size.
- Funding for the Community Food Projects would be increased to $7.5 million per year through FY 2011.

The committee action suggests that the bill will move on its own timeline, receiving congressional consideration before TANF reauthorization. In fact, the sponsor of the bill, Rep. Larry Combest (R-TX) plans to take quick action and has stated that he will accept no amendments that would significantly change its current provisions.

The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) has released its *FY 2000 Preliminary Data Preview Report*, with information on the program’s performance for the fiscal year. Among the report’s findings:

- Of the $1,354,080,032 that was collected from families currently receiving public assistance, 86% was retained as reimbursement for assistance. Only 12% ($165,262,203) was paid to families.
- For every $1.00 spent on child support enforcement, $3.95 was collected. Of this $3.95, $.57 was collected from TANF cases, and $3.38 was collected for non-TANF cases. Based on figures provided in the report, $.38 was collected from TANF cases for every $1.00 spent.
- In FY 2000, states kept 42% of child support collected on behalf of TANF families, and received an additional 14% in incentive payments from the federal share. The
federal government kept 37% of payments made on behalf of TANF families, leaving TANF families with just 6% of the support collections, and 1% in medical support payments.

*The report is available at the OCSE website,* [www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse). -RM

### Domestic Violence Advocates Urge Improved Services and Funding To Address Domestic Violence

The Family Violence Prevention Fund released their annual report grading states on their policies specific to domestic violence victims in health care settings. The study found that many states had done little to improve their performance since last year and most were lacking in comprehensive or even basic efforts to address the needs of domestic violence victims in hospitals and clinics. Few states have any laws on training health staff on domestic violence (ten states), on screening patients for domestic violence (three states), or on providing protocols for identifying domestic violence, documenting it in medical records, and providing referrals for domestic violence services (eight states). Just 13 states report domestic violence to law enforcement in a manner safe to the victim and only 22 states provide protection from insurance discrimination against victims. The authors note an urgent need for attention to the health care and safety needs of domestic violence victims in health care settings providing them care.

*The full report with individual state grades is available at* [http://endabuse.org/statereport](http://endabuse.org/statereport).

In a separate announcement, advocates are concerned that Bush’s budget is shortchanging domestic violence victims the full level of support awarded to them by Congress through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorized in Fall 2000. Bush has proposed $100 million less than the $667 million authorized by VAWA last year. Though his proposed budget is strong in funding criminal justice measures, health and human services would be underfunded, falling $58 million short in funding for shelters and $35 million short in rape crisis prevention and education. In addition, advocates would like to see funds appropriated in the 2002 budget for transitional housing for domestic violence victims who are striving for financial independence from their abusers.

*Those concerned can contact their legislators to allot the full funding to these programs at* [www.stopfamilyviolence.org](http://www.stopfamilyviolence.org). -AL

### HHS to Hold Regional Forums on TANF Reauthorization

On September 5, the Department of Health and Human Services announced that it will hold regional forums on welfare reform. The forums, described as “listening and discussion sessions,” will be held this fall in five cities around the country with the first scheduled for September 24 in Atlanta, GA. They will be led by Wade Horn, HHS Assistant Secretary for Children and Families.

The sessions represent the administration’s first move toward the reauthorization of TANF. Originally created by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (PRWORA), TANF must be reauthorized by 2002, a process that will open up the program’s provisions to any number of changes. Early indications are that the Bush administration will seek to create a greater emphasis on marriage, abstinence and responsible fatherhood while maintaining the strict work requirements and time limits already a part of TANF.
The announcement of regional forums comes after a series of efforts by Grassroots Organizing for Welfare Leadership (GROWL) to have the experiences of welfare recipients heard by the Bush administration. When requests for such hearings were initially denied by HHS Secretary Thompson, GROWL organized a post card campaign requesting hearings of Representative Wally Herger (R-CA), who chairs the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources. After a meeting between GROWL representatives and Rep. Herger, the regional forums were announced. For more information regarding the forums, go to www.acf.dhhs.gov.

**Need for Affordable Housing Evident**

A recent report from the National Housing Conferences confirms a shortage of affordable housing for full-time workers. The study followed professionals in five occupations (including teacher, police officer, nurse, janitor, and salesperson) and found that many were living in substandard conditions, were spending more than half of their income on housing, and/or were working two to three jobs to afford decent and safe housing for their families while also affording food, child care, and health coverage. Investigators found that needs had increased in recent years with the rising cost in housing both for renters and house owners in both urban and suburban communities. The National Housing Coalition is sponsoring a conference on October 4 in Boston to address the country’s housing needs.

*To register for the conference or to view the full report, visit www.nhc.org.*

In another attempt to improve housing affordability, more than forty advocacy groups for the homeless and poor recently convened at the Capitol to advocate for the establishment of a federal trust fund to build affordable housing. Such a federal fund would match local and state trust funds and building efforts for low-income families that have in the last twenty years provided 200,000 units of affordable housing around the country. A study by the Center for Community Change shows that an investment of $5 billion could additionally provide 1.8 million new jobs and potentially $50 billion in wages.

*For a list of groups involved in the project or for more information, visit www.usnewswire.com/topnews/Current_Releases/0906-102.html or www.nhtf.org.*

**Report Finds Income, Not Work Alone, Produces Positive Outcomes for Children**

The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) has released a report, *How Children Fare in Welfare Experiments Appears to Hinge on Income*, by Arloc Sherman, that examines the impact of income, both when it is increased and when it is reduced, on children of parents participating in welfare-to-work programs. The report clarifies that getting welfare recipients to work does not in itself have a positive impact on children. When work results in reduced income, the impact on children is strikingly negative and alarming.

Sixteen welfare-to-work programs that operated in the early to mid-nineties and that were evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration Research formed the basis for the analysis by CDF. Of the 16 programs, 5 increased average income, 4 reduced average income, and 7 had no significant impact on income. The outcomes for children were categorized as either “good”, “neutral” or “bad”. The study found the following:

- Every program that increased average income had at least one significantly improved child outcome and no negative child outcomes.
• All four programs that reduced income had mostly bad outcomes for children, including increased suspensions at school, and behavioral, mental health and other health problems.
• For programs that reduced income, the proportion of mothers who lost custody of their children nearly doubled, to 8.5%.

The report can be obtained on-line at www.childrensdefense.org. -AL and RM

Report Released on Gender Stereotyping in Job Training

A recent report from the Institute on Women’s Policy Research suggests that job training programs are prone to place women exclusively into jobs traditionally worked by women, in fields including hospitality, childcare, cosmetology, and office work, even though some women may be interested in nontraditional employment. Access to nontraditional jobs would potentially increase women’s wages since jobs usually held by male counterparts such as truck driving, welding, carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, and computer programming generally provide wages one-third higher. While it may be quicker for job trainers to place women in traditionally women-held jobs, the Institute recommends that trainers provide more comprehensive training and thus encourage more stable and higher paying work. Specific recommendations for the provision of sustainable wages to women and their families include: an extended training period that should include access to training programs for nontraditional jobs, two-year or four-year community college and university education, and increased access to vocational and technical training for female high school students.

The report can be found at www.iwpr.org. -AL

States Continue to Experience Problems with Child Support Disbursement

On August 9, Ohio Governor Bob Taft ordered the reimbursement of $38 million to low-income families whose child support had been illegally withheld by the state since October 1997, but the reimbursement plan has not been accepted as a settlement to two lawsuits filed against the state by the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support (ACES). On September 18, ACES walked out of settlement discussions because it says the state began revoking some of its reimbursement promises. The state has admitted to illegally withholding state refund checks and other overdue child support payments from former welfare recipients. -RM

Office of Child Support Enforcement Commissioner Appointed

Sherri Z. Heller, Deputy Secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare’s Office of Income Maintenance, has been appointed to head the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. Ms. Heller has administered Pennsylvania’s TANF, Medicaid, Food Stamp energy assistance, child support enforcement and child support payment processing systems under Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge.