

Drug Testing for TANF...?



**Women With A Vision's
NO Justice Project**
Health Promotion | Advocacy | Harm Reduction

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Money to criminalize or money for treatment

The past several years, Louisiana State Representative John LaBruzzo (Republican), has introduced legislation that would require random drug-testing for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) recipients. This legislation, if passed, would require from 50%-20% of all TANF program participants to submit to, and pay for, these random tests with their own funds. This proposed policy would actually reduce the funds available to those most in need while criminalizing and stigmatizing as opposed to providing treatment. Such an initiative would negate the original intention of the law and hinder the provision of assistance to vulnerable persons and families while failing to address the root causes of poverty within our community.

Drug testing for TANF recipients is a fiscally irresponsible waste of resources

Drug-testing is an expensive and ineffective method of identifying individuals with substance abuse issues. These tests only identify drug usage, not addictions or drug abuse problems. The drug tests themselves, will often identify casual marijuana users but fail to identify stronger, more addictive substances that clear out of the system quickly, such cocaine, methamphetamine, and opiate-based drugs (Drugs of Abuse Reference Guide, 2011).

Welfare recipients have been shown to use drugs at the same rate as the general public

The state and national proposals to require drug-testing for TANF participants assume that such testing will produce a high number of positives and thus save the regular taxpayer money. However, it has been shown that welfare recipients use illegal substances at the same rate as the rest of the population (NIH, 1996). This means that a high number of test kits will be negative -- each negative test kit is approximately \$42 of wasted taxpayer money. This money would be better spent on treatment for individuals struggling with addictions and disorders.

Drug testing is not the most effective or sensitive way to identify people struggling with addictions

Over half the states currently use a "screen-and-refer" method to detect and intervene with TANF recipients. Questionnaires and surveys, designed to identify problematic users and refer them to treatment, are able to distinguish between abuse and use while also detecting alcohol abuse issues. These methods of assessment are far more cost effective and less time-consuming than broad drug testing for TANF.



Drug Testing TANF recipients will hurt children and families disproportionately

The majority of TANF recipients are children from impoverished families (U.S.D.H.H.S, 2010). The Drug Policy Alliance notes that “removing or restricting assistance due to the behavior of a parent punishes children for circumstances beyond his or her control” (2011). Additionally, the increased stigma and fear attached to applying for TANF benefits has the potential to deter needy individuals with children and families from applying at all; thus increasing the vulnerability experienced by impoverished families and children.



Louisiana should be spending their limited funding on addiction treatment, counseling, and other services that will actually meet the needs of our community

Although those proposing Drug Testing for TANF recipients argue that such measures would *encourage* individuals to seek treatment, this proposal fails to provide any funding for treatment itself --- even though **treatment is an extremely efficient and cost-effective intervention to treat substance abuse**. It is clear that proponents of drug testing for TANF eligibility have neither, the best interests of those experiencing substance abuse issues, or the average taxpayer, in mind.



We encourage you to do your part and let your elected officials and representatives know that you

DO NOT SUPPORT MANDATORY DRUG TESTING FOR TANF RECIPIENTS AND OTHER POLICIES INTENDED TO HURT OUR COMMUNITIES RATHER THAN HELP !



Women with a Vision, Inc. aims to improve the lives of marginalized women, their families, and communities by addressing the social conditions that hinder their health and well-being. We accomplish this through relentless advocacy, health education, supportive services, and community-based participatory research. A grassroots collective created by women of color, Women with a Vision has been a community presence in New Orleans and Louisiana for over 20 years.