

Written by Sen. Charles Grassley
Tuesday, 23 February 2010 13:06

WASHINGTON – Sen. Chuck Grassley, ranking member of the Committee on Finance, said he’s stunned that 56 percent of able-bodied adults who receive welfare benefits are receiving zero education, job training, job search, substance abuse counseling or community service activities.

“This is a waste of potential and opportunity,” Grassley said. “Those receiving welfare benefits should be involved in education or job training to improve their economic prospects and income security. Either states are failing these individuals, or they’re failing themselves by not taking advantage of what’s available to them.”

Grassley highlighted the latest data released last week by the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. The department released the 2008 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participation data, the most recent information available. The data show that despite minor improvements to encourage states to engage families receiving welfare in meaningful activities included in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, states are failing to engage work-ready adults in education, job training, job search, substance abuse counseling or community service activities. According to the latest data, states report that 56 percent of able-bodied adults are engaging in zero job- or education-related activity. The report is available here; the 56 percent figure is in Table 8B:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/particip/2008/index2008.htm>

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“This lack of activity is especially troubling during the tough economy,” Grassley said. “Welfare is an integral part of the social safety net. The benefits are meant to be temporary, and welfare programs are supposed to help adults move away from welfare and onto something permanent. During the bad economy, we can’t afford to let any more people fall behind. We should be using this time to prepare people for economic recovery.”

Grassley said fostering a cycle of dependence where families receive welfare absent any activity or responsibility is not consistent with the landmark 1996 welfare reform bill. A key principle of the bipartisan welfare bill was replacing an uncapped entitlement to welfare with a temporary program that encouraged work and work-related activities.

“There’s obviously a lot more work to be done to ensure that families receiving welfare have the opportunity to make the transition from dependence to self-sufficiency,” Grassley said. “The authorization for TANF and related programs ends at the end of this fiscal year. I call on the congressional leadership and the Administration to work with me this year to enact a bipartisan reauthorization of these programs that fixes the elements that aren’t working for the people they’re meant to help.”