

Washington, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Gwen Moore (WI-4) introduced the Rewriting to Improve and Secure an Exit Out of Poverty Act (the RISE Out of Poverty Act or the RISE Act), an overhaul of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant (TANF). Original co-sponsors include Reps. Danny Davis (D-IL), Edolphus Towns (D-NY), John Conyers (D-MI), Benny Thompson (D-MS), Donna M. Christensen (D-VI), Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO), Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-DC), Pete Stark (D-CA), Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-IL), and Maxine Waters (D-CA).

Fifteen years ago Congress replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) Program with TANF - a program that eliminated entitlements, imposed work requirements, and established barriers to education and training. Fifteen years later we continue to mourn the failures of TANF and its inability to lift low-income families out of poverty.

“When we ended welfare as we knew it, our economy was booming,” said rep. Gwen Moore. “The unemployment rate was 5.6 percent, there was unprecedented growth in employment and earnings among single-parent families, and the poverty rate fell to 13.7 percent. Instead of continuing to strengthen this safety net by building on the successes of AFDC we now find ourselves facing one of the worst poverty crises in the history of our country.

“Today, the unemployment rate stands at 8.6 percent and despite recent economic growth more than 43 million Americans including 14.7 million children live in poverty, the highest in the more than 50 years since we have been tracking this data. Additionally, the poverty rate among women climbed to 14.5 percent in 2010 from 13.9 percent in 2009, the highest in 17 years.

“It is clear that TANF has systematically failed to adequately respond to the growing needs of our most vulnerable populations. That is why I am pleased to introduce the RISE Act which would make sweeping, common sense reforms to the TANF program to ensure that it works for, rather than against, the populations it was originally intended to serve.”

Key provisions of the RISE Act will:

- Index the block grant for both inflation and child population growth in the state since 1996.
- Replace the current contingency fund with one based on the Emergency Contingency Fund enacted in the Recovery Act which helped to create over 260,000 jobs,
- Lift all time limits on work participation requirements and the 30% state cap on education,
- Adjust the federal work participation requirements so that states could get credit when individuals with disabilities participate in work-related activities - even if the nature of those activities or the number of hours do not match the standard TANF requirements,
 - Guarantee child care for TANF work-eligible recipients,
 - Pass through all child support collected directly to the family,
 - Eliminate full family sanctions and lifetime sanctions and establish a Pre- and Post-Sanction Review Process requiring states to continuously work with families that are subject to sanction or have already been sanctioned,
 - Stop the clock during a recession, and
 - Stipulate that the number one goal of TANF is child poverty reduction.

“As a former welfare recipient who was able to work her way out of poverty with the help of AFDC, I understand the acute need to revamp this program that has been failing our most at-risk populations,” said Rep. Moore. “It is time that we break down these barriers to assistance and provide low-income families with the support they need and deserve.”

Supporters of the RISE Act include: 9to5, National Association of Working Women; Campaign for Community Change, Center for Women Policy Studies, Coalition on Human Needs; Community Action Partnership; Legal Momentum; LIFETIME; Nashua Soup Kitchen & Shelter; Inc.; National Association of Social Workers, National Center for Law and Economic Justice; National Health Care for the Homeless Council; National Network to End Domestic Violence; NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby; The Arc of the United States; Welfare Warriors; Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Women for Economic Justice (WEJ); Women of Color Policy Network, NYU Wagner; YWCA.

For a copy of the full legislation, please contact Nicole Y. Williams at (202) 225-4572.

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