

(Lone Tree, CO) Today, U.S. Representative Mike Coffman (R-Aurora) sent a letter to Governor John Hickenlooper, signed also by Representatives Doug Lamborn, Cory Gardner, and Scott Tipton, urging him not to weaken the work participation requirement in the 1996 Welfare Reform law by applying for a controversial waiver recently offered by the Obama administration.

The original law gave broad authority to states to design their own programs to meet the federal work participation requirements. Coffman, as a state senator in 1997, carried the legislation that created Colorado's own version of welfare reform: "Colorado Works."

Last month, however, the Administration urged states to seek waivers for the work requirement for welfare recipients on the tax-payer funded Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, or TANF. According to Coffman: "What President Obama did was to say that the cornerstone of welfare reform -- the work participation requirement -- was now optional for states to meet."

The work participation requirement mandates that the recipient has to be engaged in work, training, or education in exchange for cash assistance. The intent is for welfare recipients to affirmatively demonstrate that they are moving toward self sufficiency as a condition for being on public assistance, so that it does not promote a culture of dependency.

The letter to the Governor notes that the outstanding success of the 1996 reform was because of the work requirement. "The lack of a firm work requirement, no matter how it is disguised as a demonstration program or attempt at flexibility, will only revert the system back to the worst excesses of previous years." Further, the letter points out that the work requirement is essential to overcoming welfare: "People who receive training and education and move beyond government welfare into the labor force improve their lives far more than just economically. They not only function better, but they pay taxes, contribute more to society, and serve as better role models and community members."

It appears that President Obama assumes that his new version of welfare will be in place until it is challenged in the courts. Given that the case will have to wind its way through the federal court system -- all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court for a final decision -- it could be years before that law is fully restored to its original intent.

Besides requesting Governor Hickenlooper not seek a work-requirement waiver, Representative Coffman is joining with other members of Congress to see what actions can be taken to reverse President Obama's decision and save the goals of the 1996 Welfare Reform Law.

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