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New CLASP Couples and Marriage Brief

CLASP has just released its sixth brief in the Couples and Marriage Series—*Rethinking Welfare Rules from a Marriage-Plus Perspective* by Paula Roberts and Mark Greenberg. The brief, adapted from the paper *Marriage and the TANF Rules* by the same authors, explores the relationship between public benefits rules and marriage.

The authors start the brief by asking the following questions: Do public benefits rules affect decisions to stay single, cohabit, or marry? If so, in what ways? Answering these questions raises complex issues that are endemic to any system that provides benefits on a group (i.e., family) basis rather than looking at individual needs. The complexity becomes particularly acute when eligibility for or amount of a benefit depends on household composition and income. Thus, these questions arise in a broad range of means-tested benefits, such as cash assistance, child care, food stamps, subsidized housing, and Medicaid, as well as tax system rules.

This policy brief examines the issues in the context of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The authors focus on TANF for two principal reasons:

- All of the rules and choices discussed are entirely within a state's control. A state wishing to restructure its program is free to do so.
- Since there are virtually no federal constraints (except those relating to resources), examining TANF rules allows a pure opportunity to consider what kinds of policies are most appropriate for a means-tested program.

While the focus is on TANF rules, many of the principles and issues explored are applicable to the structuring of other means-tested programs and may also be relevant to discussions of family structure and tax policy.

The authors note there is broad agreement that program rules should *not penalize* marriage. Beyond this, there is no general consensus about what the rules of a public benefits system should seek to accomplish in relation to family structure. Some contend that the system's rules should encourage or advantage two-parent families whether married or cohabiting. Others would encourage or advantage only married-couple families. Still others think a system that neither encourages nor discourages a particular family structure is the more appropriate goal. Which rules are "right" for a



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All Together Now: Report on State Pre-K

State pre-kindergarten programs have grown dramatically in the last two decades, and much more attention is being paid to the school readiness of children. In 1980, there were only 10 state programs; now at least 38 states and the District of Columbia have one or more pre-kindergarten initiatives. A new CLASP report, *All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-Kindergarten*, studies the emergence of the mixed delivery model, in which pre-kindergarten is delivered in community-based settings and schools.

The report focuses specifically on the policies associated with implementing pre-kindergarten programs in community-based child care settings, as opposed to Head Start programs, community colleges, and other types of programs. It describes findings of a CLASP survey of 29 states that was undertaken to understand the policy choices, opportunities, and challenges of including community-based child care providers in their pre-kindergarten programs. The report:

- Summarizes the methodology CLASP used to conduct the survey.
- Describes the policy choices that states are making in implementing pre-kindergarten in community-based child care programs, including illustrative examples.

- Discusses the emerging implications of the findings and offers a set of policy and research recommendations for state policymakers to consider as they design and implement pre-kindergarten programs.

The authors find that the majority of states implementing pre-kindergarten programs have opted for some version of mixed delivery. Moreover, the emergence of this model is significant to the future of early childhood education because it has the potential to: 1) break the traditional barrier between early education and child care policies and address the needs of children in working families in a coordinated way; and 2) strengthen the quality of community-based child care programs.

However, whether the promise is actually met depends on the policy choices made by states and the ways in which these choices are implemented, the authors point out. State pre-kindergarten policy choices also have the potential to strengthen the quality and program standards of community-based child care programs. State child care licensing standards primarily focus on assuring basic health and safety protections and do not usually provide support to improve and strengthen quality, although many states also require limited program activities related to general educational content. State child care subsidy programs, which responded to increased funding in the 1990s by expanding access and making some investments to improve quality, are now moving backwards. According to the Government Accountability Office, at least 23 states have limited child care assistance for some families since 2001, and many have also made cuts in their activities to improve child care quality.

Coordinated planning and implementation between state pre-kindergarten and child care programs, and increased resources to integrate early education standards in child care, have the potential to increase quality across the variety of settings preschool-age children are experiencing, often in the same day. This could lead to a system in which children can experience the same level of program

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The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), a national, nonprofit organization founded in 1968, conducts research, legal and policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security for low-income families with children.

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CLASP Submits Testimony on TANF Reauthorization

As the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) legislation is moving toward reauthorization in Congress, CLASP recently submitted written testimony to the Human Resources Subcommittee of the House Committee on Ways and Means. CLASP submitted testimony on the work-related provisions and on the child support and fatherhood provisions in the House TANF reauthorization bill, H.R. 240.

Work-Related Provisions

The testimony, submitted by Mark Greenberg, Nisha Patel, and Hedieh Rahmanou, notes that there has been dramatic growth in single-parent employment since 1996 (when the legislation creating TANF was enacted), but much of the employment has been in low-wage jobs without employer-provided benefits. Many families still receiving assistance have serious employment barriers, and a group of families with serious barriers is now not in work and not receiving welfare. The expansion of supports for working families outside welfare has been a critical contributor to the employment growth, but those supports are increasingly at risk because TANF and child care funding have remained flat. The sharp decline in reserve funds underscores that, at current funding levels, states will find it difficult or impossible to sustain current service levels over the coming years.

In this context, CLASP has urged that the work-related provisions of reauthorization focus on efforts to improve job quality; encourage a stronger focus on employment retention and advancement; expand child care and other supports for working families outside welfare; and ensure that states have incentives to work with, rather than terminate assistance to, families with the most serious employment barriers.

Much of the reauthorization debate has centered around the mechanics of the participation rate calculation for families receiving TANF assistance. Based on the experi-

ence since 1996, there is little reason to believe that this should have been the central issue in reauthorization: a large share of TANF resources is now used for families outside the traditional welfare system, and participation rates measure engagement in activities among families receiving assistance, not the effectiveness of programs in promoting employment.

In the testimony, the authors address key work-related provisions of H.R. 240 and recommend modifications based on the belief that promoting and supporting work should be central to state welfare reform efforts. They conclude that several provisions of H.R. 240 will make it harder for states to run effective programs to connect families with jobs and will encourage states to terminate assistance to families rather than working with them to help them find sustainable employment.

Child Support and Fatherhood

States have more than doubled their child support collection rates since 1996. In addition, the number of children with legally established fathers has nearly tripled, and orders for health care coverage have more than quadrupled, since Congress made improvements to child support collection in 1993.

CLASP's Vicki Turetsky submitted testimony urging the Human Resources Subcommittee to make two critical changes to support the commitment of parents to their children: first, to provide funding to state and community-based programs that reach out to unemployed, often destitute, fathers to help them get back on their feet, find steady work, and support their children; and second, to make sure that children directly benefit from the financial support paid by parents through reforms to child support distribution rules. Turetsky urges the Subcommittee to reform the distribution rules by doing the following:

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CLASP Releases Budget Analyses

After President Bush released his fiscal year 2006 budget, CLASP responded with two papers that explain the impact of the Administration's child care and adult education funding decisions. Families would be denied child care assistance, and adults would lose access to literacy and English classes if Congress acts on the President's proposed cuts.

Child Care

In *President's Budget Projects 300,000 Low-Income Children to Lose Child Care by 2010*, Hannah Matthews and Danielle Ewen point out that according to the Administration's own calculations, an estimated 300,000 fewer low-income children will receive child care assistance by 2010. The President's budget would freeze child care funding for 2006—and projects that child care funding would remain frozen for the next five years, through 2010. Yet, child care assistance is critical to the success of low-income working families.

Reports by the Government Accountability Office and the National Women's Law Center have shown that states have responded to frozen child care funding and rising costs by cutting working families from the program, raising the cost to families to participate, and reducing programs that improve the quality of care.

Last year's budget showed that in 2003, an estimated 2.5 million children were served by all major federal funding streams for child care. These funding streams include the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant, and the Social Services Block Grant. According to the Administration's data, the number of children receiving child care fell to 2.3 million in 2004. These budget projections show that the number of children served will further decline to 2 million by 2010.

Adult Education

In *President's Budget Sabotages Pipeline of Skilled Workers*, Julie Strawn and Amy-Ellen Duke estimate that nearly half a million people—at least 470,000—would be denied literacy, Adult Basic Education, GED, and English as a Second Language services due to the President's proposed budget cuts. Because states must use 25 percent of their own monies in order to receive federal adult education funds, states may cut back on their own investment in proportion to the federal cut, resulting in even more students being turned away. Over time, these cuts will doom millions of Americans to unemployment and low-wage jobs. In addition, businesses risk a shortage of skilled workers at a time when the U.S. workforce is aging.

More than 51 million American out-of-school youth and adults lack a high school diploma or GED, and 29 million are in need of English language services. However, only 2.8 million individuals can be served by current public adult education and English language efforts, according to the Department of Education. Yet the Bush Administration proposes to slash funding for these programs by nearly three-fourths (74.1 percent)—from the current \$501.1 million to \$131.4 million.

Some states would be especially hard hit:

- More than half of those seeking services would have to be turned away in 11 states—Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas—and in Puerto Rico.
- Eleven states would lose 75 percent or more of their federal adult education funding—California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas.
- Another 25 states and Puerto Rico would lose at least 70 percent of their grants.

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A Guide for Facilitating Re-entry

As the rates of incarceration have climbed and the subsequent rates of recidivism have stayed stubbornly high, state and local governments and the U.S. Congress have begun to pay more attention to ex-offenders returning to the community. The Council of State Governments (CSG) and 10 partners have recently released a comprehensive report on this topic that offers hundreds of recommendations for reducing public spending and increasing public safety by promoting the safe and successful return of ex-offenders to the community.

The report, titled *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community*, is the result of the work of CSG's Re-entry Policy Council, coordinated by CSG and comprised of 100 bipartisan leaders at the state, local, and national level. The report provides 35 policy statements, which include descriptions of the problems and recommendations for implementing the proposed policy. In addition, the report highlights many re-entry initiatives throughout the country.

The policy statements of particular interest to *CLASP Update* readers include:

- Promoting systems integration to ensure continuity of care, supervision, and effective service delivery between criminal justice, workforce, and human services systems.
- Developing an intake procedure that can be used to assess the strengths, risks, and needs of individual inmates.
- Developing a programming plan that, based on information obtained from inmate assessments, explains what programming should be provided during incarceration to ensure successful return to the community.
- Facilitating physical and mental health care and providing substance abuse treatment.
- Providing services and supports for family members and children of prisoners, and, when appropriate, help-

ing to re-establish and strengthen prisoner relationships with their families, including encouraging payment of child support.

- Providing inmates with work experience and skill-building programs, including the creation of transitional jobs.
- Ensuring that those who exit prisons as a potential risk to public safety receive some form of community supervision.
- Facilitating access to stable housing upon re-entry into the community.
- Planning continuity of care so that individuals receive uninterrupted services and support upon re-entering the community.
- Promoting, where appropriate, the employment of ex-offenders and creating job opportunities for them.
- Connecting inmates to employment and employment services before their release to the community.
- Providing services, as needed, to the family members, victims, and relevant community members.
- Ensuring individuals exit prison with appropriate forms of identification and that those eligible for public benefits receive them immediately upon their release from prison or jail.
- Recognizing and addressing the obstacles that make it difficult for an ex-offender to obtain and retain viable employment while under community supervision (includes a discussion of transitional jobs).

The report maintains that no one agency or organization can, on its own, implement the recommendations of a single policy statement. Collaboration and partnerships among parties unaccustomed to working together will be critical to success. ■

■ To view sections of this 600-page report online or to find out how to order it, visit: www.reentrypolicy.org.

- **Eliminate pre-assistance assignment.** Pre-assistance assignment means that families who tried to hold out the longest before going on welfare can lose all of the support owed to them, even though they were not receiving assistance at the time. If families could keep this money, they would have a better chance of leaving welfare sooner and staying off longer.
- **Eliminate the federal tax offset exception.** Under the current rule, the state keeps the child support collected on a family's behalf so long as a family receives TANF assistance. Once the family leaves assistance, the family keeps most of the collected child support. However, if the support is collected through one specific method—by withholding federal tax refunds—the state keeps the money, instead of the family. This exception means that the government withholds a private source of income and undermines the efforts of a parent to support his child, right at the point when the family has left welfare and is trying to make ends meet.
- **Mandate federal participation in child support pass-through.** Under the current law, states can decide to pass through support to families while they are receiving TANF assistance. Research from Wisconsin's welfare program shows that parents pay more child support, are more willing to establish paternity, and are less likely to work underground when the support is passed through to their children. Among parents who pay

support regularly, the study suggests improved child outcomes and less severe conflict between the parents.

- **Allow states the flexibility to implement early and completely.** States need flexibility to implement early so that they can coordinate distribution changes with other computer upgrades or computer replacement efforts.

On fatherhood funding, Turetsky urges the Subcommittee to do the following:

- **Appropriate new funding for program grants.** Past House and Senate reauthorization bills have authorized—but not appropriated—funds for fatherhood programs.
- **Target resources to low-income parents.**
- **Permit the funds to be used to help parents get jobs.** In past reauthorization bills, the Senate version allowed the fatherhood program money to be used for direct employment services, as well as marriage. However, the House bill emphasized marriage services, and does not permit funds to be used for direct employment services. ■

■ To view both sets of written testimony, visit the Welfare Policy page of the CLASP website, www.clasp.org.

Many of these same states face especially high demand for adult education services:

- In 17 states, many of them in the South or Southwest, at least 1 in 4 adults is in need of adult education and/or English language services.
- In six of these 17 states—California, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, Texas—30 percent or more of all adults lack a high school diploma, have limited proficiency in English, or both.

This analysis includes a table that estimates the impact of the proposed cuts in adult education and English language services on a state-by-state basis. ■

- To view the child care budget analysis, visit: www.clasp.org/publications/cc_2006_budget.pdf.
- To view the adult education budget analysis, visit: www.clasp.org/publications/adult_ed_budget_cuts.pdf.

benefits system depends, of course, on which policy goal is being advanced.

CLASP has adopted a “Marriage Plus” perspective. From this perspective, two goals should be paramount in designing public benefits programs: 1) the state should seek to develop rules that do not discourage marriage; and 2) these rules should not disadvantage children who live in single-parent families.

This policy brief proceeds from this perspective and describes some of the research addressing the effects of the different welfare policies over the years on family formation decisions. The brief then provides a framework for preliminary analysis of how to proceed. Finally, the brief concludes with some suggested concrete policies that would neither discourage marriage nor disadvantage children being raised in single-parent families.

Both the brief and the longer paper on this topic are available at www.clasp.org in the Welfare Policy or Couples and Marriage sections of the site. To receive a hard copy of the brief, please call (202) 906-8000. ■

quality whether they spend their days in a school, a child care program, or a Head Start program. Integrated policies across child care and school systems could also increase standards and resources for quality improvements in child care that will benefit children as they grow from infancy to their preschool years, and on through their time in elementary school.

While there are important potential advantages in the community-based model, there is no guarantee that implementation will result in policies and programs that meet the model’s potential. There may be wide variation in the initial or subsequent quality levels of participating providers, and it may be difficult to monitor and track provider performance. Some providers are likely to need far more technical assistance and support than others. It

Other Recent CLASP Publications

Stay up-to-date on the latest child support regulations and find out more about the economic reasons for businesses to provide paid sick days for their workers.

In *New Regulation on Review and Adjustment of Child Support Orders* Paula Roberts describes a new Interim Final regulation on review and adjustment of child support orders in states using the guidelines method of adjustment. The Office of Child Support Enforcement is proposing to return to a policy under which these states can adopt quantitative standards for adjusting support orders. Such standards allow states to disregard adjustments of a small magnitude, even when such adjustments could be consequential for both low-income custodial parent families and obligors.

In *Presenteeism and Paid Sick Days* Jodie Levin-Epstein discusses new research that suggests that when workers are sick on the job, their presence comes at a cost to employers — the “hidden” cost of reduced productivity. This four-page paper defines “presenteeism” and discusses what can and is being done about it. ■

may be more difficult to encourage or require consistent standards, compensation, and benefits for teachers across multiple settings in a mixed delivery model. And, expansion of pre-kindergarten in community-based settings would require support services and ongoing monitoring that is targeted to these settings.

To receive individual detailed descriptions of each of the 29 states’ responses to the CLASP survey on the state policies used to integrate pre-kindergarten into community-based child care settings, please e-mail Danielle Ewen at dewen@clasp.org or Rachel Schumacher at rschumacher@clasp.org. ■

■ To view the full 61-page document, visit: www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf.

CLASP Audio Conferences in March and April

Fridays 12:30-1:30 pm (ET) with host Jodie Levin-Epstein

MARCH 18, 2005

**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY BALANCE:
AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR
KATHRYN EDIN**

As the co-author of *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*, Kathryn Edin, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, studied the lives of low-income single mothers living in eight poor Philadelphia-area neighborhoods over six years. She will explore such questions as: How do jobs and job stability play into poor women's decisions regarding marriage? Do poor women view marriage as a means to balancing work and family? Why is the prospect of two potential incomes through marriage trumped by other concerns for the family?

APRIL 15, 2005

**WORK AND PUBLIC HOUSING:
ENCOURAGING RESULTS FROM JOBS-PLUS**

A multi-year evaluation of Jobs-Plus, a place-based employment initiative in public housing, showed the program produced substantial improvements in residents' earnings. How much did residents work? How big were the effects of Jobs-Plus on their employment, earnings, and welfare receipt? Did different kinds of families have different outcomes? Did life in the housing developments change? Will Congress take note? Guests for this audio conference include: James Riccio, Senior Fellow, MDRC; Barbara Sard, Director of Housing Policy, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; and Mark Calabria, Majority Staff, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

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