



TESTIMONY OF THE MICHIGAN LEAGUE FOR PUBLIC POLICY ON SB 1386 CLARIFICATION OF THE FAMILY INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

SUBMITTED TO THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 4, 2012

Good morning Chairman Kahn and members of the Committee. I am Melissa K. Smith, Senior Policy Analyst with the Michigan League for Public Policy (formerly the Michigan League for Human Services). Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am here to voice our opposition to SB1386 which would codify the current DHS policy implementing the 60-month lifetime limit on the Family Independence Program.

This bill is in direct conflict with the legislation passed by this body in the summer of 2011 that, while tightening the exemptions to the 48-month time limit of the Family Independence Program, still preserved cash assistance for disabled recipients and for families caring for a disabled child or spouse. The 48-month time limit started counting months from 2007, when the original 48-month time limit was enacted, whereas this bill would start counting months from 1996, when welfare reform occurred.

When DHS implemented an additional 60-month lifetime limit beyond the 48-month limit passed by the Legislature, thousands of families were removed from assistance, many of whom had severely disabled children. This was not the intent of the Legislature when they clarified the 48-month time limit exemptions as families where a parent was taking care of a disabled child or spouse were specifically listed as an exempted group.

Alarming, this bill goes even further than the 60-month lifetime limit that the Department of Human Services tried to implement last fall, which at least allows an exemption from the time limit for parents that are disabled. This bill could effectively prevent anyone from receiving benefits beyond the 60-month lifetime limit, even if they are disabled. Though the bill does seem to grandfather recipients with disabilities who are currently exempted, it is unclear if any disabled parent who applies for benefits after the effective date of this bill will be exempted from the 60-month limit at all.

For households with a disabled family member, many will deal with this disability for life. If this bill is implemented, there could be no exemptions -- not for seniors, not for a mother with cancer and not for a parent taking care of a child with leukemia.

When this body contemplated the changes to the 48-month time limits in 2011, there were months of debate and discussion to create a policy that members of this body viewed as equitable, eliminated exemptions thought unnecessary and continued to protect those that were most vulnerable. This bill would override all of this work and run counter to the careful consideration already made regarding exemptions to the cash assistance program. There are so many important issues here; this discussion should not be rushed through a lame duck session.

If this bill passes, there may no longer be exemptions for the family with a child with Down Syndrome or a parent with multiple sclerosis. Is this really the intent of the Legislature? To harm these families? I would hope not. And that is why the League urges members of this committee to vote "no" on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on this important issue.