



GOVERNOR OF MISSOURI

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TO THE SECRETARY OF THE SENATE  
98<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
FIRST REGULAR SESSION  
STATE OF MISSOURI

Herewith I return to you Conference Committee Substitute for House Committee Substitute for Senate Substitute No. 2 for Senate Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 24, entitled:

AN ACT

To repeal sections 208.040, RSMo, and to enact in lieu thereof four new sections relating to nonmedical public assistance.

I disapprove of Conference Committee Substitute for House Committee Substitute for Senate Substitute No. 2 for Senate Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 24 (Senate Bill No. 24). My reasons for disapproval are as follows:

Senate Bill No. 24 is a misguided measure that punishes poor children in the legislature's zeal to reduce reliance on government assistance. If enacted, this legislation would jeopardize the lives of Missouri's children in two ways: first, by reducing the length of time that they can receive benefits even if their parents are working and second, by eliminating their benefits if their parents are not meeting the work requirements.

Like the majority of states, Missouri law currently imposes a lifetime limit of 60 months for eligible recipients to receive monthly payments from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Senate Bill No. 24 would reduce the lifetime limit for TANF benefits to 45 months. Only eight other states have shorter lifetime limits. The impact of this reduction on Missouri's children would be as harsh as it is unnecessary. If Senate Bill No. 24 were to become law, an estimated 3,155 families would see their payments terminated on January 1, 2016. This would mean that approximately 6,465 children would have this support, upon which they depend, immediately cut off through no fault or action of their own; 40 percent of these children are under the age of five. And tens of thousands of more children will fall victim to this provision in the future. This drastic impact on children could be minimized through any number of provisions that the legislature should have considered, such as exempting the children in families that are currently receiving TANF benefits. "Grandfathering" these children would offer some protection from a change in the rules sprung upon them after initially committing up to 60 months of support.

The justifications offered by proponents for this reduction in benefits to children do not withstand scrutiny. TANF benefits are not lucrative. The average TANF benefit is \$228 per month in Missouri, and to even be eligible to receive this amount, the family's income must be very low; for example, a family of three cannot earn more than \$292 a month. TANF dependency is not increasing - in FY2014, 13 percent fewer families received TANF benefits than did so in FY2013.

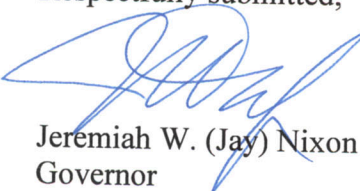
To further damage the children of Missouri, Senate Bill No. 24 would impose a penalty on the child of a parent who fails to engage in defined work activities as a condition for receiving TANF benefits. Under current Missouri law, a parent or caretaker seeking TANF assistance must engage in specified work activities in order for the full benefit to be paid. Failure to do so results in a 25% reduction of the benefit. This sanction is an appropriate consequence for the parent's noncompliance with the work requirement while not eliminating the availability of assistance for the children in the family. However, if Senate Bill No. 24 were to become law, the entire benefit would be eliminated and young children would be forced to suffer further from their parents' failure to meet those obligations. Applying a penalty to children in these circumstances is harsh and should not become the law of Missouri.

It is important that a program like TANF be as effective for taxpayers as possible, and one means of doing so is to ensure that the adults who participate in the program accept the personal responsibility for work that the program properly requires. But Senate Bill No. 24 goes far beyond holding adults accountable. Instead, it punishes children for the behavior of their parents. Rather than imposing a sanction on the children of adults who fail to meet the work requirements, the legislature could have authorized, as it has in other circumstances, a protective payee to receive and administer the children's share of the TANF benefit, thereby making the reasonable distinction between adults who are responsible for meeting the requirements and children who are not. But the legislature failed to do so. This is fundamentally unfair, and I will not support it.

I cannot condone the hardships imposed on innocent children that Senate Bill No. 24 would require – first, by unnecessarily cutting the length of time that children can receive benefits even when their parents are working and second, by cruelly eliminating their benefits if their parents are not meeting work requirements. Missouri law should not mandate such meanness toward innocent children.

In accordance with the above stated reasons for disapproval, I am returning Conference Committee Substitute for House Committee Substitute for Senate Substitute No. 2 for Senate Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 24 without my approval.

Respectfully submitted,



Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon  
Governor