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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

February 25, 2019

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

I am writing on behalf of the County of Santa Barbara in support of legislation to reauthorize and enhance the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Enclosed are letters we have sent to the Finance Committee in support of TANF reauthorization legislation that includes the restoration and enhancement of state and county flexibility to tailor work and support services that move families into self-sufficiency based on their unique needs. TANF was founded on the idea that states should have the flexibility to design their programs suited to their unique populations in order to help families transition from assistance to self-sufficiency. However, the last reauthorization of TANF, as part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, was heavily weighted toward Federal oversight and penalties instead of state flexibility, a change that was unwarranted given the progress states made in reducing the welfare rolls after TANF was implemented.

In California, counties administer and provide county financial support for TANF, known as CalWORKS, with oversight from the State. As such, Santa Barbara County supports a more balanced approach between federal oversight and state flexibility to enhance its ability to achieve more successful outcomes through the program. This includes criteria that measure its effectiveness by utilizing more outcome-based measures, and that restore and enhance the flexibility to tailor work and support services to local needs. In particular, the County supports the reversal of the damaging changes to the Work Participation Rates formula and definition of "work" implemented by DRA.

Many recent reauthorization proposals have only included level funding for TANF, which would have continued the ongoing erosion of the program that amounts to about a 30 percent decrease of the block grant in real terms since 1996. In addition, the reauthorization process provides an opportunity to increase support for TANF subsidized employment programs and child care.

As Congress moves forward with TANF reauthorization legislation, please support efforts that would increase funding for the program, provide increased flexibility for states and counties, and include incentives gauged toward effective measures of welfare program success.

Sincerely yours,

Don Gilcrest
Washington Representative

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Enclosures