

# Welfare advocates oppose time limits

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Erica Griggs' sole transgression was her failure to give the Department of Transitional Assistance two weeks' notice before leaving her job as a sales clerk. She was laid off and two weeks' notice wasn't possible.

For that infraction, she lost her state-funded child care voucher. This made finding another job all the more difficult. Because job applicants generally don't bring their children with them to job interviews and because Griggs couldn't afford to pay for child care, her options were limited.

"I had to go back on welfare to get child care," she says. "Once you're on welfare, it's easy to get it, but it shouldn't be that way."

While Griggs was able to obtain a voucher fairly quickly, families not receiving Temporary Aid for Families with Dependent Children have a much longer wait, according to state Sen. Dianne Wilkerson.

Last week, Wilkerson received a memo from the state's Office of Child Care Services showing that 14,926 children across the state are on the waiting list for the vouchers. While TAFDC recipients are fast tracked for the vouchers, those not receiving benefits face slim chances of obtaining a voucher.

Welfare advocate Terry Hamilton displays the lyrics to songs written in protest of Governor Mitt Romney's proposed changes to the state's welfare guidelines. Hamilton and others say the work requirements for women receiving Temporary Aid for Families with Dependent Children place too much of a burden on families (Sahar Lawrence photo).

Given that shortfall, Wilkerson questions the administration of Governor Mitt Romney in its goal of toughening work requirements for TAFDC recipients.

"If we had 500 more women who wanted to find meaningful work, we couldn't do it," she said in an interview Monday. "It's not in the budget."

Romney administration officials have maintained that there will be sufficient funds in the budget. Department of Transitional Assistance spokesman Dick Powers said Wilkerson's claims are unfounded.

"That's the exact same thing that was said in 1995 when welfare reform was first enacted," he commented.



The governor's plan would require adults with children one-year-old or older to work, while the current plan applies only to adults with children two or older. Under the Romney plan adults with children between the ages of 2 and 5 would be required to work 30 hours a week, while the current plan requires those parents to work 20 hours a week.

Under the current system, 25 percent of people receiving TAFDC are required to work. Under the proposed system that percentage would double.

Powers notes that Romney's budget would include an additional \$6.4 million for child care and an additional \$8 million for educational programming.

But state Rep. Alice Wolf said she

doesn't think Romney has sufficiently accounted for needs of the recipients who would be forced to work, many of whom have disabilities or have children who have disabilities.

"They would need tremendous support systems," she said. "I don't think Governor Romney is willing to do that."

Wolf says there is not adequate funding for transportation or care of disabled children. Nor is there funding for training programs for disabled parents who would be asked to find work.

Whether or not the administration pushed through its changes, which were proposed in January, welfare advocates say the current system is not working well for working parents.

Terry Hamilton, an advocate for TAFDC recipients, says she frequently

sees women who lose their benefits.

"It's a horrible shame that there are so many women losing their benefits," she said. "Their children are suffering."

Powers says the proposed changes in the requirements would bring the state into compliance with federal standards for AFDC.

"Failure to do so could result in the loss of tens of millions of dollars," he said.

But Wilkerson disagreed, noting that state and federal laws mandate that welfare-to-work programs provide adequate assistance for TAFDC families.

"We have a legal requirement under state law to provide for child care and transportation," she said. "And we have more than 14,000 children on the waiting list for income eligible children. Who are we fooling?"