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Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Welfare Reform Legislation

June 21, 1994

To the Congress of the United States:

I am pleased to transmit for your immediate consideration and enactment the "Work and Responsibility Act of 1994."

It is time to end welfare as we know it and replace it with a system that is based on work and responsibility—a system that will help people help themselves. This legislation reinforces the fundamental values of work, responsibility, family, and community. It rewards work over welfare. It signals that people should not have children until they are ready to support them, and that parents—both parents—who bring children into the world must take responsibility for supporting them. It gives people access to the skills they need and expects work in return. Most important, it will give people back the dignity that comes from work and independence. The cost of the proposal to the Federal Government is estimated at $9.3 billion over 5 years and is fully offset, primarily through reductions in entitlements and without new tax increases.

The Work and Responsibility Act of 1994 will replace welfare with work. Under this legislation, welfare will be about a paycheck, not a welfare check. Our approach is based on a simple compact designed to reinforce and reward work. Each recipient will be required to develop a personal employability plan designed to move that individual into the work force as quickly as possible. Support, job training, and child care will be provided to help people move from dependence to independence. Time limits will ensure that anyone who can work, must work—in the private sector if possible, in a temporary subsidized job if necessary.

This legislation includes several provisions aimed at creating a new culture of mutual responsibility. It includes provisions to promote parental responsibility and ensure that both parents contribute to their children's well-being. This legislation establishes the toughest child support enforcement program ever. It also includes: incentives directly tied to the performance of the welfare office; extensive efforts to detect and prevent welfare fraud; sanctions to prevent gaming of the welfare system; and a broad array of incentives that States can use to encourage responsible behavior.

Preventing teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births is a critical part of welfare reform. To prevent welfare dependency, teenagers must get the message that staying in school, postponing pregnancy, and preparing to work are the right things to do. Our prevention approach includes a national campaign against teen pregnancy and a national clearinghouse on teen pregnancy prevention. Roughly 1,000 middle and high schools in disadvantaged areas will receive grants to develop innovative teen pregnancy prevention programs.

The Work and Responsibility Act of 1994 proposes dramatic changes in our welfare system, changes so bold that they cannot be accomplished overnight. We can phase in these changes by focusing on young people, to send a clear message to the next generation that we are ending welfare as we know it. The bill targets resources on welfare beneficiaries born after December 31, 1971. This means that over time, more and more welfare beneficiaries will be affected by the new rules: about a third of the caseload in 1997, and half by the year 2000. States that want to phase in faster will have the option of doing so.

The results of these changes will be far-reaching. In the year 2000, 2.4 million adults will be subject to the new rules under welfare reform, including time limits and work requirements. Almost 1 million people will be either off welfare or working.

But the impact of welfare reform cannot be measured in these numbers alone. This legislation is aimed at strengthening families and instilling personal responsibility by helping people help themselves. We owe every child in America the chance to watch their parents assume the responsibility and dignity of a real job. This bill is designed to make that possible.

I urge the Congress to take prompt and favorable action on this legislation.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
June 21, 1994.