

Legislation would extend child care time for mothers on welfare [US] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Michigan mothers in a state welfare-to-work program would be able to stay home with their infants for a year after giving birth under legislation introduced recently in the state House.

Michigan law now requires mothers in the state's Work First program to go back to work after three months to keep getting checks from the state Family Independence Agency. That isn't long enough to promote family stability, state Rep. Michael Murphy said Monday.

The legislation also is designed to help families avoid problems associated with the lack of good, affordable child care, he said.

An estimated 8,000 newborns and their mothers would be affected by the legislation each year. Murphy expects the effort to extend the exemption could face opposition in the Republican-dominated Legislature.

"This is a difficult issue for Republicans," said Keith Ledbetter, spokesman for House Speaker Rick Johnson. "It pits those who believe parents should be at home with those who want to make sure welfare recipients support themselves."

Liz Boyd, a spokeswoman for Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm, said the administration could support the bill with some changes needed to make sure it conforms with federal requirements.

Michigan has been a leader in encouraging able-bodied people to work rather than rely exclusively on welfare. Federal regulations allow mothers to stay home with their babies for 12 months, but Michigan law setting the three-month limit was passed in late 1995.

The state has cut welfare costs by requiring more people to work. But supporters of the Murphy bill say allowing mothers to stay home longer before returning to work could save the state money in the long run by cutting costs associated with child abuse and foster care.

Advocates of extending the time requirement say it would promote more stable families by reducing stress, including child care concerns.

- reprinted from Associated Press

Region: United States ^[2]

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