

# This year's welfare bill trashes 'family values' [US] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The current welfare bill expects single mothers to work more hours without any more child-care support. Let's face it, only a male-dominated organization would fail to connect the dots between single mothers leaving welfare and the need for more child care.

The welfare reauthorization bill approved by the House and Senate Finance Committee last year didn't give enough help to poor families trying to raise children and work their way out of welfare.

Now, the deadline for the final Senate vote on the bill--HR 4--is March 31. Will there or won't there be money to help families with child care? To a great extent, the outcome depends on Maine's Republican senator Olympia Snowe.

The Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C., estimates that child care expenses range anywhere from \$4,000 to \$10,000 a year per child. More than one of every four families with young children earn less than \$25,000 per year, while a two-parent family in which both adults work for minimum wage only earns a combined income of \$21,400 per year.

The child-advocacy group reports that even if low-income working families could set aside 10 percent of their income (\$2,140) for child care, they would still fall several thousand dollars short of what they need for average-priced child care for one child. Clearly, child care costs for low-income families are prohibitive. If single mothers can't find it, or can't afford it, their only choices will be to remain unemployed or rely on haphazard child care.

It's not just the cost of child care, either. Children need quality care, and parents need to know that their children are safe. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found in a recent study that the higher the quality of child care that children receive before they reach three, the greater the child's language abilities and cognitive development and the more ready for school they will be. Universal Pre-K and Head Start have proven over the years that early intervention with young children at risk for school failure can improve school performance. However, the Bush administration is cutting funds to those programs, as well.

Without affordable, quality child care, parents cannot work and provide their families the kind of child care that children need to thrive, stay healthy and do well in school. Mothers should not be forced to work for longer hours each week, often in minimum wage jobs, unless the government shows enough sense of "family values" to ensure the health and safety of these children.

A recent report published by the National Poverty Center shows that single mothers who have access to affordable, reliable and quality child care are more likely to work. Without these options, single mothers find it difficult, if not impossible, to find and maintain jobs.

When it comes time for them to debate HR 4, senators should put themselves in the shoes of the millions of children and parents who struggle daily with low incomes and the need for quality child care. When it comes time for them to vote, they should act like human beings and not require mothers to work more hours without giving them a way to also take care of their children.

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