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14-518-39

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
MATTHEW E. BAKER

PO BOX 202068
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-2068
PHONE: (717) 772-5371
FAX: (717) 705-1835

DISTRICT OFFICES:
74 MAIN STREET
WELLSBORO, PA 16901
PHONE: (570) 724-1390
FAX: (570) 724-2168

430 CANTON STREET, SUITE 6
TROY, PA 16947
PHONE: (570) 297-3045
FAX: (570) 297-5551



2010 JUN 24 A House of Representatives

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JUL - 6 2010
INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Office of Income Maintenance
Bureau of Policy

June 23, 2010

Honorable Harriet Dichter, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare
Room 333 Health & Welfare Building
Harrisburg, PA 17105

JUN 28 2010

REPER TO: _____

Dear Secretary Dichter;

This letter is in reference to the Department of Public Welfare's proposed regulations titled "Revisions to the Special Allowance for Supportive Services Requirements" (#14-518) Health and Human Services Committee (R) staff has been in communication with the Department's Office of Income Maintenance and Office of Policy Development on this proposal and we are optimistic that our concerns will be addressed as this regulation makes its way through the process. This letter is simply written to make you aware of my concerns formally.

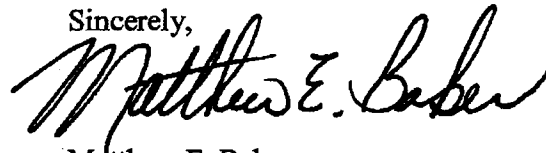
I am concerned about the annual and lifetime limits in the proposed regulations. Although the existing regulations limit the value of certain allowances, those regulations do not limit how often allowances needed for education or training may be issued, nor do they limit needed transportation payments (other than a \$250 a month maximum for public transportation). These newly proposed limits may harm individuals seeking to better their lives through education or training, especially as the training needed for a family-sustaining job may take more semesters than the proposed cap would allow for.

We are particularly concerned at the harm these limits may cause people in rural areas, who may need to travel long distances for quality training. Indeed, even some city residents would run up against these limits if their education or training program is in a suburb. The lifetime limits may also harm individuals who have worked their way off welfare but suffered a setback - such as domestic violence, a child's disability, or simple job loss - requiring them to start again.

The attached statement from a KEYS program parent illustrates the kind of harm from DPW's proposed caps that I am concerned about and would not like to see happen.

I look forward to continuing our work together so that DPW's rationale for the changes will be better understood and any remaining questions will be answered and, if necessary changes made, before the regulation is implemented finally.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew E. Baker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Matthew E. Baker
Republican Chairman
Health & Human Services Committee

cc: Kim Kaufman, Executive Director
Independent Regulatory Review Commission

Honorable Frank Oliver, Chairman
Health & Human Services Committee

enclosure

My name is Heather Geyer and I live in Scottdale, PA in Westmoreland County. I currently receive TANF for myself and my three-year old son. I get exactly \$316 per month.

I began the KEYS program in August of 2008 and graduated from Westmoreland County Community College with an AAS in Human Services. I decided to enroll in the KEYS program because I wanted a better life for me and my son and Community College was perfect because it was close, affordable, and I liked the quality of education I was receiving there. On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest), I would say that the KEYS program would be a 10. Not only did the program help me financially, but it also helped me to stay on track. I really want to thank the KEYS program because without it, I would not have been able to complete my degree.

The supportive services of the KEYS program were vital to me in completing my education. There would have been no way that I could afford the transportation for getting to school and completing my internships. The Human Services Program at Westmoreland Community College requires that I complete 2 three-month internships. I did my first internship at Early Head Start in the summer of 2009, running from May 8th to June 7th. This internship was 36 miles from my home. I completed my second internship at the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC), which is 29 miles from my home. In order to complete these internships, I needed mileage reimbursement from DPW in order to be able to just make it there. Without this help, I would not have been able to complete the

internships and receive my diploma and would have had to drop out of Community College and the KEYS program. I am very grateful for this help.

I understand that if DPW's proposed annual \$1500 cap on transportation and mileage reimbursement had been in effect when I was in school, I would have reached the annual limit in May of 2008, just when I was beginning my Early Head Start Internship. My mileage for those months was about 4045. I got \$0.25 per mile from DPW, which was \$1,011.45. If there had been a cap on transportation, then I would have had to pay out of pocket, which would never had happened receiving only \$316 a month from my TANF benefits. I would not have been able to afford the travel expenses and would have had to stop going to my Head Start internship.

I also would have had the same problem with my second internship at ARC if transportation funding was capped, reaching the \$1500 mark in early February, just after starting my internship. That means that I would not have received reimbursement for travel for the rest of February, March, April and May. My travel for those months was 3871 miles. I received \$967 in reimbursement from DPW for those miles of travel. But with the cap I would have received zero. There is no way that I would have been able to afford over \$900 in travel expenses with just the \$316 I receive each month from TANF. I would not have been able to afford to travel to my internship at ARC and would have had to stop going.

After I graduated from Community College, I was offered a job at ARC. My internship there is probably what got me the job offer. I will start there this

summer working part-time for the first three months at \$8.50/hour. Then, I can start working full-time at \$9.00/hour, with a raise to \$10 after 12 months. My employer is also providing full family health care coverage, which means that medical assistance will end just as my TANF benefits are ending.

Without the reimbursement for traveling to my internships, I would never have been offered a job opportunity because I could not have afforded to travel to the internships and would not have been able to finish school. I would have been a college dropout. This job opportunity with ARC means that I no longer have to rely on TANF, medical assistance or subsidized housing. This job means financial independence.