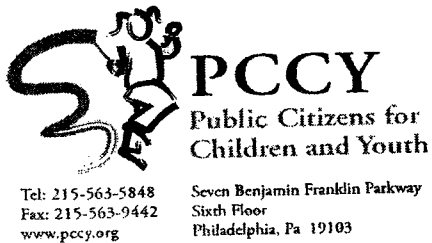


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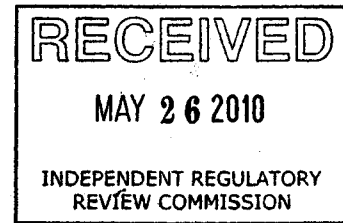
#14-518-30



Office of Income Maintenance
Bureau of Policy

MAY 25 2010

REFER TO: _____



May 24, 2010

VIA EMAIL (EZogby@state.pa.us)

Edward J. Zogby, Director, Bureau of Policy
Health and Welfare Building, 4th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17105

**RE: Department of Public Welfare's Proposed Rulemaking, No. 14-518, Revisions
to the Special Allowance for Supportive Services Requirements**

Dear Mr. Zogby:

On behalf of Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), I write to *withdraw our previous letter in support* of the Department of Public Welfare's recently proposed regulations. Upon more closely reviewing the details, *PCCY opposes the proposed regulations* as they would unnecessarily limit the availability of welfare-to-work supports for Pennsylvania families.

While we can appreciate that the Department would like to stretch its resources as far as is possible to help families move from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), General Assistance (GA), and SNAP into employment, the rigid limits on transportation and work-related expenses may well cause undue hardship on some program participants.

Current TANF grants pay less than one-third of the poverty line. A family of three, for example, receives only \$403 per month in most Pennsylvania counties, an amount that has not increased in twenty years. This is simply not enough for many families to pay the costs of transportation, books, school supplies and other work supports necessary to move off of welfare. The Department of Public Welfare's (DPW's) proposals would make it even more difficult for families to escape poverty.

Existing regulations and policies, strengthened last Fall by DPW, already ensure that work support are issued only to families who prove both that (1) the work supports are needed and (2) the payment is used for its intended purpose. It appears that DPW's main goal is to save money, even at the risk of preventing some families from accessing support payments for valid job, training or education expenses they incur as they work to leave welfare.

We are concerned that the proposed regulations would impose limits that are too low on the amount of critical special allowances that a family might receive. For example, an individual would only be able to receive \$2,000 in her lifetime to spend on books and school supplies, and \$1,500 per year on transportation. Many program participants, particularly in rural parts of the

state, travel a substantial distance to work, training, and education sites. If a parent reaches the maximum payment for transportation or books and supplies, she may be forced to curtail her education or training, quit a job, or stop looking for work.

All of these outcomes directly contradict the goals of the program. They are not in the Department's best interests, and certainly are not in clients' best interests. We recommend that the annual and life-time limits be dropped.

We acknowledge the proposed regulations increase some program benefits for the participants, such as the mileage rate for a private vehicle. We support this much needed increase. Ironically, however, increasing the mileage rate to appropriately reflect the rising cost of travel while also capping the total amount available will cause some participants to lose access to this much needed support.

In addition, we have significant concerns about the impact of several other provisions:

- Proposed 55 Pa. Code §165.1 (a) appears to require that those who are exempt from RESET (work) requirements as a result of the disability, domestic violence, or other circumstance, but nonetheless wish to volunteer for education or training activities, comply with hours requirements they may not be able to meet consistently. This will discourage clients with barriers from preparing themselves for eventual employment. And, we believe this provision violates the “exempt volunteer” rule in the Pennsylvania Welfare Code at 65 P.S. §405.1(b).

We recommend that DPW delete the proposed language stating that clients “and shall comply with the requirements of the AMR or EDP.”

- Proposed 55 Pa. Code §165.44(b)(2)(viii) would impose a supportive services overpayment for non-compliance with work requirements, without regard to the degree of non-compliance. Under this provision, a client who, for example, attends her program for 29 hours in week, instead of the required 30 hours, could be required to pay back the full amount of supportive services payments issued to her in that week, even though those work supports were actually required and used for their intended purpose.

We recommend that DPW drop subsection (viii) from this proposed regulation.

- Proposed 55 Pa. Code §165.44(a)(2) would create unnecessary red tape by requiring employers and training providers to verify that transportation to the work or training site is required, even when the need for such transportation is readily apparent. Employers should not be asked to prove the obvious, especially as they often have no more knowledge than welfare office staff of the employee's transportation options. Individuals who live more than walking distance from their job or training site should not have to prove they need transportation to get there.

We recommend that DPW add the following exception to the requirement that need be verified: "unless, with regard to the need for transportation, readily available information regarding the travel distance demonstrates the need."

In this recession, Pennsylvanian families need more help — not less — to obtain quality education and training that will lead to self-sufficient jobs. Limiting supports is a short-term solution with long-term negative impacts - on the working adults, most of whom are parents, and ultimately on their children who are then more likely to remain in families in poverty. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shelly Yanoff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Shelly Yanoff, Executive Director

CC: Arthur Coccodrilli, Chair, Independent Regulatory Review Commission