

May 18, 2017
Chris Hackett Testimony
House GOP Policy Committee
Welfare Reform Hearing

Hello, my name is Chris Hackett and I am the President & CEO of i2M, a polymer manufacturing company located right here in Luzerne County. Formerly, I ran The OneSource Companies a staffing and recruiting company.

I want to thank Chairman Benninghoff of the Policy Committee for holding this hearing and Representative Kaufer for inviting me to speak today.

As a longtime employer in the staffing industry, I firmly believe that the best way to reduce poverty is a welfare system that rewards work and a robust economy. Put simply, we do more for those on welfare by prioritizing work. Moreover, I can attest that people want to work, but the system consistently discourages them.

Despite spending 40 cents of every dollar sent to Harrisburg on Human Services, our poverty problem is growing. Per the most recent census data, in 2015, 23,000 more Pennsylvania families fell below the poverty line than in 2010. Instead of providing a path out of poverty, our system is trapping Pennsylvanians in a debilitating cycle that deprives individuals of their dignity.

While efforts to reduce fraud and waste are important, I believe rewarding work is the key to reducing poverty here in Luzerne County and across the state. Nationwide, robust work requirements have freed thousands from welfare. The work-first welfare reforms from the 1990s moved millions of people into the labor force and dramatically reduced the number of children in poverty. More importantly, the dignity of work created a positive role model for children in these households and laid the foundation for a more positive live and work situation.

Today, states are launching a new wave of work-first welfare efforts. Just look at Kansas. When the state strengthened SNAP or food stamp work requirements for able-bodied adults the rolls dropped by 75%, but more importantly, 60% of those leaving food stamps found employment within one year and significantly raised their incomes.

Pennsylvania should enact similar reforms, but we shouldn't stop at food stamps, Medicaid beneficiaries need help too.

Today there are nearly 14,000 people with disabilities who truly need assistance on waiting lists for support. All while the state has expanded Medicaid coverage to some 700,000 able-bodied adults. This seems backwards. Instituting work requirements would not only give individuals the ability to lift themselves out of poverty, it will also provide more state resources for the truly vulnerable.