



MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Pennsylvania House
FROM: Susan Frietsche
DATE: October 8, 2018
RE: **Support Women in Recovery: Vote NO on SB 6**

The Women's Law Project urges you to support low-income women and families by voting no on SB 6.

This bill partly repeals Act 44 of 2003, bipartisan reform legislation prime-sponsored by then-Senator Jane Earll (R-Erie) with the strong support of over 100 organizations including the District Attorney's Association, the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and women's drug and alcohol service providers.

Act 44 opted Pennsylvania out of a federally-imposed lifetime ban on TANF assistance for anyone with an addiction that led to a drug-related felony conviction or guilty plea. Ninety percent of people who rely on TANF are women; the vast majority of those banned for life were women with children.

Criminal justice and drug policy experts, together with women's drug treatment professionals and domestic violence programs, saw from first-hand experience that bans on public assistance sabotaged women's recovery prospects and made the drug problem worse, not better. With Act 44, we adopted a better model that is tough but no longer counterproductive, where individuals who have drug convictions must comply with probation or parole requirements, must comply with treatment, and must submit to drug testing as a condition of receiving benefits. This law can be found at 62 P.S. § 432.24.

After Pennsylvania opted out of the federally-imposed lifetime ban, other states followed our lead. Over the last 20 years, as legislators see the evidence that bans on welfare or food stamps for drug convictions are counterproductive, states have continued the trend of waiving such bans. Its in this context, and amid an opioid epidemic, that Pennsylvania is choosing to go backward.

SB 6 would turn back the clock on sensible reform. SB 6 purports to re-impose a TANF ban—this time for 10 years--only for people convicted of crimes involving certain quantities of drugs. Additionally, a hidden administrative hurdle has been built into this poorly designed bill: for a welfare caseworker to verify what quantity of drugs led to a previous conviction would mean digging up the applicant's criminal justice records, because that information is not available by a simple review of a person's criminal history. In practice, we would be putting a mountain of red tape in the way of helping impoverished women who are succeeding in their recovery get on their feet and rebuild their lives.

This is one of several ways in which SB 6 loads new, unnecessary clerical work on the Department of Human Services. SB 6 would also require DHS to figure out the value of applicants' cars (which, of course, tells us nothing about the ownership interest the applicant has in the vehicle—that is, whether it is borrowed or owned outright or how much equity the applicant has in it). This provision is particularly repugnant because it plays into an invidious stereotype that poor people drive around in Cadillacs—an urban myth with no supporting evidence.

SB 6 increases the cost of a replacement EBT (electronic benefits) card, and imposes a punitive \$100 fee the second time a replacement card is needed. Many of us have lost a credit card or a health insurance card more than once, and it is hypocrisy to hold poor families to a higher standard. The \$100 fee will cause immense suffering and deprivation to the entire family, children included.

Please reject this counterproductive, poorly conceived, cruel, costly bill.