

**April 16, 2002**

**The Honorable Bill Thomas  
Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means  
United States House of Representatives  
1102 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515**

**Dear Chairman Thomas:**

**The undersigned organizations write to support Section 419 of H.R. 3113, "The TANF Reauthorization Act of 2001." This provision would repeal Section 115 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which stipulates that persons convicted of a state or federal felony offense involving the use or sale of drugs are subject to a lifetime ban on receiving cash assistance and food stamps. Our comments focus on the urgent need to remove this lifetime ban for low-income and poor families, based on six years of experience we now have with the impact of the ban. The repeal of this provision is essential to the rehabilitative efforts of women ex-offenders and to the well-being of their children.**

**The lifetime welfare ban undermines the efforts of mothers to overcome addiction, develop essential marketable skills, become more productive members of their communities, attain self-sufficiency, and provide a safe and healthy living environment for their children. Studies show that most women with drug convictions committed their crimes while in active addiction, were using drugs in response to physical and sexual assault to self-medicate the pain of the abuse they were experiencing, and have had little access to help in dealing with their addictions or the abuse they were experiencing prior to being arrested.**

**The denial of cash assistance and food stamps to women as they return to their communities and attempt to rebuild their lives is counterproductive. As one affected woman has said, "now it really matters because I'm trying to do the right thing." The lifetime welfare ban:**

- ? Endangers some of the most basic human rights of low-income and poor families, including food, housing, and clothing;**
- ? Makes it extremely difficult for women to enter or complete substance abuse treatment programs, or maintain recovery from addiction;**

- ? **Interferes with the ability of mothers to find work or to return to school or enter job training programs to gain essential skills to become competitive in the labor market; and**
- ? **Limits the effectiveness of community-based drug treatment programs that rely heavily on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and food stamps to cover their operating costs.**

**The harmful effects of the lifetime welfare ban on the services of drug treatment programs undermines two key initiatives of the Bush administration:**

- ? **The National Drug Control Strategy which recognizes the increased need for community-based drug treatment programs in combating addiction in the US, and in turn tackling the drug trade which plagues the nation; and**
- ? **The national welfare plan which calls for “making special accommodations for individuals who need substance abuse treatment and job training” before they can successfully return to the labor market.**

**Numerous studies have demonstrated that TANF recipients with drug problems and criminal justice histories need treatment and other supportive services to make the expected transition to self-sufficiency. The denial of TANF and food stamps to women convicted of non-violent drug offenses makes the transition out of poverty very difficult for their families, and in some cases improbable.**

**As a result of the lifetime welfare ban, women who seek to rebuild their lives face a very uncertain future with greater obstacles than before their contact with the criminal justice system. Consequently, there is an increased likelihood that women will be compelled to live under very precarious environments - abusive relationships, overcrowded households – and to engage in illegal activity to survive and avoid homelessness. Moreover, child poverty and family dissolution will increase and parental supervision and involvement in the lives of children will decrease. It is estimated that since 1996, 92,000 women are no longer eligible for welfare benefits due to a drug conviction, placing 135,000 children at risk of coming in contact with child welfare services and the criminal justice system.**

**The lifetime welfare ban not only affects women ex-offenders and their children, it also impacts our communities. As an increasing number of**

women return to their communities without any support networks to assist in the transition back to their families and communities, lacking the marketable skills to become self-sufficient, and without comprehensive and adequate drug treatment to overcome their addiction, the societal costs associated with the ban will extend to the criminal justice and health care systems, as well as child welfare services, among others.

For these reasons, we support Section 419 of H.R. 3113 which repeals the lifetime welfare ban. We call for the immediate passage of this section of the bill. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

**African American Community Education Project**  
**Alaska Network on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault**  
**Alliance for Children and Families**  
**American Civil Liberties Union**  
**American Friends Service Committee**  
**Americans for Democratic Action**  
**Association of Alcoholism & Addiction Programs of Washington State**  
**Association of Substance Abuse Programs of Texas**  
**Bazon Center for Mental Health Law**  
**Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law**  
**California Food Policy Advocates**  
**Center for Economic and Social Rights**  
**Center for Women Policy Studies**  
**Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice**  
**Children's Defense Fund**  
**Coalition for Ethical Welfare Reform**  
**Colorado Center on Law and Policy**  
**D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project, Inc.**  
**Delaware Center for Justice**  
**Drug and Alcohol Service Providers Organization of Pennsylvania**  
**Drug and Alcohol Treatment Association of Rhode Island**  
**Drug Policy Alliance**  
**Episcopal Diocese of Maryland**  
**Family and Corrections Network**  
**Food Research and Action Center**  
**Friends Committee on National Legislation (Quaker)**  
**Harm Reduction Alliance**  
**HELP USA**  
**Institute for Health and Recovery**

**Justice Policy Institute**  
**Leadership Conference on Civil Rights**  
**Legal Action Center**  
**Legal Services for Prisoners with Children**  
**LIFETIME (Low-Income Families' Empowerment Through Education)**  
**Massachusetts Law Reform Institute**  
**Mental Health & Substance Abuse Corporations of Massachusetts, Inc.**  
**Montana Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence**  
**NAADAC - The Association for Addiction Professionals**  
**N.A.A.C.P.**  
**National Advocates for Pregnant Women**  
**National Association of Black Social Workers**  
**National Association of Social Workers**  
**National Black Police Association**  
**National Council of La Raza**  
**National Legal Aid & Defender Association**  
**National Mental Health Association**  
**National Prison Project of the ACLU**  
**National TASC**  
**New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence**  
**North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence**  
**NYS Coalition Against Sexual Assault**  
**Ohio Council of Behavioral Healthcare Providers**  
**Pacific Crest Consortium**  
**Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund**  
**Rainbow/PUSH Coalition**  
**Recovery A Choice**  
**South Carolina Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors**  
**South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault**  
**South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault**  
**State Associations for Addiction Services**  
**Suscol Intertribal Council**  
**TASC, Inc. - Illinois**  
**The Sentencing Project**  
**The Urban Justice Center**  
**Therapeutic Communities of America**  
**Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations**  
**United Church of Christ, Justice & Witness Ministries**  
**Virginians Aligned Against Sexual Assault**  
**Women of Color Resource Center**  
**Women's Law Project of Philadelphia**

## **YW Housing – Washington**

*The following organizations became signatories after April 16, 2002:*

**American Psychological Association**

**Center for Third World Organizing**

**CHOICE**

**Coalition on Human Needs**

**CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)**

**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Office for Governmental Affairs**

**Florida Council Against Sexual Violence**

**Homeless Prenatal Program**

**Iowa Substance Abuse Program Directors' Association**

**Join Together**

**Kemba Smith Foundation**

**National Black Women's Health Project**

**National Center on Poverty Law**

**National Network of Abortion Funds**

**National Partnership for Women & Families**

**New York State Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers**

**NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund**

**St. Philip House**

**Service Employees International Union, Local 535**

**Women's Business Development Center**

**Women's Environment and Development Organization**

**Women Employed**

**Women Leaders Online**

**YWCA of the U.S.A.**