

## Proposed Amendments to TANF to Assist Adults and Children with Mental Disorders:

### The American Public's Views of Welfare Reform

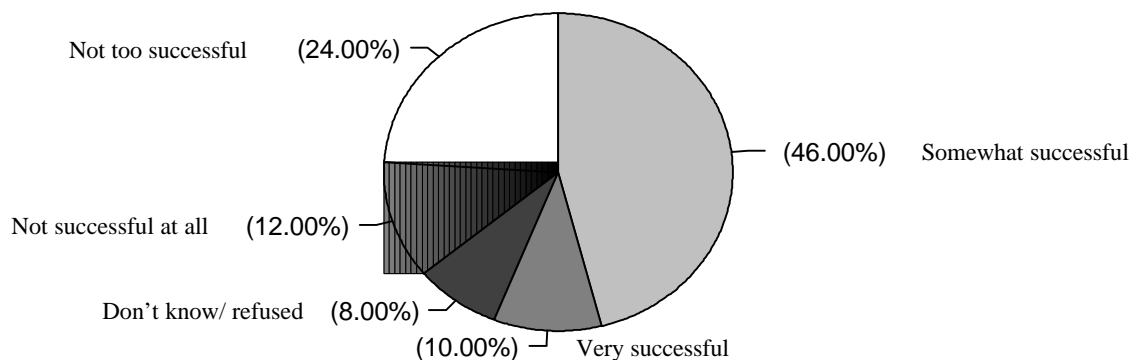
February 2002

A public opinion survey of 1002 adults finds that Americans are ambivalent regarding the overall success of welfare reform. They are very clear, however, that some issues are of utmost importance and should be targeted in future reforms. The public is concerned about:

- The effects of welfare reform on children- welfare policies should strongly support children and help improve the quality of life for children.
  - Aiding low-income families through difficult times by lifting restrictions on activities such as education and job training.
  - The need to temporarily suspend the time limit for receiving welfare benefits.
  - Providing assistance to the working poor- a majority of Americans favor policies that help poor families even if it means less tax relief for themselves.
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- Many of the reforms sought by the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and other disability advocates are supported by these public views on how welfare should be changed.

#### GUARDED OPTIMISM REGARDING THE SUCCESS OF WELFARE REFORM

American's attitudes about the success of welfare reform are ambivalent. Relatively few feel very strongly either that welfare reform has been successful or not successful.



There is strong support for lifting restrictions to allow those on welfare to receive training and participate in education programs:

- Eighty-eight percent of respondents support the idea of allowing welfare recipients to receive education and training. Sixty-six percent of Americans strongly support the measure.
- Seventy percent of Americans continue to support the idea even if it means increasing government spending.

Americans strongly believe that the safety and protection of children is a top priority. The well-being of children weighs heavily on the way the public views the overall effectiveness of welfare reform:

- Fifteen percent of poll respondents feel that the well-being of children should be the primary factor in welfare reform, while 61% of people believe that it is extremely important.
- If the respondents believed welfare reform to be harmful to children they were more likely (57%) to view it as a failure, rather than those who believe it to be a success (36%).
- There is also strong support for funding programs targeted at helping children.
  - Eighty-eight percent of those polled support after school programs for children from low-income areas.
  - Eighty-six percent of respondents support high-quality childcare programs.

Americans increasingly feel that the five-year time limits should be lifted during tough economic times:

- In October of 2001, 46% of respondents supported the idea of temporarily lifting the time limits. In February of 2002, that number climbed to 59% backing the measure. Twenty-eight percent of those who embrace the idea are strongly supportive
- Almost half (47%) of the American people support lifting the five-year time limit even if it requires an increase in government spending.

Research for this survey was funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates who surveyed 1,002 adults between January 31 and February 4, 2002.