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MERGING WELFARE AND EXISTING UNEMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS WOULD IMPROVE SUCCESS OF WELFARE TO WORK

States Should Look to Current Unemployment and Job Training Programs for Tools to Move Welfare Recipients into the Labor Force

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, N.Y.--In their efforts to meet the work requirements of the new welfare law, states should look at existing unemployment and job training programs for tools to move welfare recipients into the work force, according to Levy Institute Resident Scholar Oren M. Levin-Waldman. In his recent Public Policy Brief, *A New Path from Welfare to Work*, Levin-Waldman contends that by integrating welfare programs with existing unemployment programs, states could improve the success of their welfare-to-work efforts while streamlining bureaucracies.

"State unemployment programs now use worker profiling to identify people who are likely to be unemployed for an extended time, so they can be moved into job training programs and assisted with their job search. This system could serve as a basis for moving welfare recipients into the work force," Levin-Waldman says. In an integrated program, unemployment offices would no longer distinguish between those who have lost their jobs and those who have been on welfare. All job seekers would be evaluated on the basis of what services they need in order to find employment.

"To realize the goals of work and self-sufficiency involves no less than breaking down the distinctions between welfare programs and employment programs," Levin-Waldman says. "Treating welfare recipients as long-term unemployed could help to ease the welfare stigma that hinders their job prospects."

Subsidies to employers to hire welfare recipients should be tied to on-the-job training programs to ensure that workers obtain useful skills while on the job, Levin-Waldman says. Those identified as most likely to need comprehensive employment services would be among the first to be selected for an employer-based voucher program.

Recently passed work-force development legislation effectively consolidates scores of federally funded training programs and funds them through block grants, much as the new welfare law does. It also emphasizes job training and placement. "Since work-force and

unemployment programs operate with structures and goals that are similar to those of the new welfare law, it makes sense for states to integrate them into coordinated programs serving unemployed people of all kinds, including welfare recipients," Levin-Waldman says. "States should take advantage of their newfound flexibility to creatively integrate and coordinate these related programs.

"If the goal of the new welfare law is to end dependency and foster a greater work ethic, then it needs to be tied more closely with existing policy aimed at developing the work force. Not only would this lead to efficiency in the delivery of public services, it would also help to ease the stigma attached to welfare," he says.

[Public Policy Brief No. 31, *A New Path from Welfare to Work, The New Welfare and the Potential for Workforce Development*, 1997](#)

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