

Help Americans in Need Develop their Ultimate Potential (HAND UP) Act – Rep. Tom Reed

The current federal welfare system is disjointed and made up of several programs which operate in silos; the programs were created at different times and for different purposes and are administered by different federal agencies. With over 46 million Americans living in poverty today it is clear that the programs are not effectively combating poverty.

In order to address poverty in America, the HAND UP Act will:

- Allow States to conduct demonstration projects for up to five years by requesting waivers from certain provisions in law in order to test methods of program integration and coordination of services.
- Enable States to gear the programs in their project towards promoting work and earnings, increasing self-sufficiency and reducing welfare dependence.
- Address the “silo-ing” of programs by allowing eligible demonstration projects to combine the administration of federal programs to better serve beneficiaries.
- Track the progress of demonstration projects through rigorous, independent evaluations and reporting on individuals served and those who reduce their dependence and complete training programs.
- Encourage applicants for the demonstration projects by allowing them to use one-half of any savings realized in the programs towards meeting federal education requirements.

Programs included in the HAND UP Act:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),
- Social Services Block Grant (SSBG),
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
- Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs, and
- Federal housing programs.

Demonstration projects were used in the lead up to welfare reform in 1996. Evidence from those projects helped to shape the creation of TANF, which has helped millions of families escape poverty. As we continue to work towards improving the opportunities for self-sufficiency for Americans living in poverty, the HAND UP Act will provide the opportunity to test ways to improve the federal welfare system.