

STRENGTHEN WELFARE WORK REQUIREMENTS

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TOPLINE: Welfare should be for those in need. Working families should not have to give up part of their paychecks to support idleness among able-bodied, working-age adults without dependents.

BACKGROUND: Milton Friedman famously [said](#), "If you start paying people to be poor, you're going to have a lot of poor people." Similarly, when you give people welfare benefits for not working, you end up with a lot of able-bodied adults not working. This reduces economic output (which can contribute to rising costs), while simultaneously reducing government revenues and increasing government (taxpayer) costs. A single unemployed worker can cost the federal budget [\\$4,200 per month](#), including costs of \$2,800 in unemployment insurance, food stamps, and Medicaid benefits, plus \$1,400 in lost federal income and payroll taxes. That's money that instead has to come from the paychecks of current and future workers—making things less affordable for them.

H.R. 1 imposed [new work requirements](#) and expanded existing ones in Medicaid and food stamps—the two largest state-administered federal welfare programs. Beginning in 2027, individuals ages 19-64 who are able-bodied and do not have dependents under age 14 must spend at least 80 hours per month in community engagement—including work, job training, education, or community service. Those changes were estimated to save federal taxpayers roughly [\\$400 billion](#) over 10 years.

Action Items (Congress and States):

- Congress should **extend H.R. 1's work requirements to other federal welfare programs.**
- **States should not attempt to broadly exempt their populations from work requirements.**

How It Would Make Life More Affordable:

- By increasing employment, work requirements help grow incomes, output, and the economy while promoting human flourishing through the dignity of work.
- Strengthening work requirements would doubly improve the federal budget—reducing welfare costs and increasing tax revenues, leading to lower inflationary deficits.

BOTTOMLINE: Workers could better afford to support themselves and their families if they didn't also have to support able-bodied adults who choose not to work.