United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

The Honorable William H. Frist
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dennis J. Hastert
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable William M. Thomas
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

January 30, 2006

Dear Mr. Majority Leader, Mr. Speaker, Chairman Grassley, and Chairman Thomas:

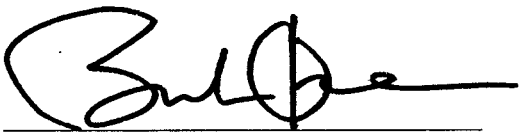
We are writing to urge you to reverse the policy in the Spending Reconciliation conference agreement that preserves a separate work participation standard for two-parent families in TANF. Because the unequal standard serves as a disincentive to marriage and the formation of two-parent households, we request that you eliminate the separate two-parent work participation standard.

While Republicans and Democrats certainly have their disagreements about how best to promote economic stability and long-term self sufficiency for low-income families, we all agree on the benefits to children of growing up with two responsible parents. The evidence shows that, on average, children in two-parent families do better in school and are more likely to lead healthy, responsible, and safe lives. That is why recent TANF legislation, including the bipartisan PRIDE Act in the Senate and H.R. 240 in the House, and Administration proposals have recognized that the separate two-parent work participation standard, which introduces an anti-marriage bias in TANF, should be eliminated.

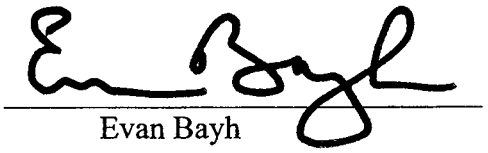
Unfortunately, as currently drafted, the Spending Reconciliation conference agreement does not reflect this long-standing consensus. The conference report maintains the separate work participation rate standard for two-parent families, while also compelling states to apply the unequal work participation standard to their own state-funded programs. As a result, many states will be faced with an unfortunate choice: stop serving two-parent families or face a penalty. The skewed incentives set by the current language undermine efforts on both the state and federal level to promote marriage and strengthen two-parent families.

We therefore urge you to reverse this policy and treat two-parent families equitably. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Barack Obama
United States Senator



Evan Bayh
United States Senator