

## **DON'T WASTE TAXPAYERS' MONEY ON HB 1297**

HB 1297 requires the welfare department to do inefficient and costly duplicate drug testing of women who are already under the supervision of the courts and probation and parole. It doesn't do anything to get women with drug problems into treatment, or to help people who are in recovery to rebuild their lives. It's also insulting and degrading, and makes it harder for people who truly need help to get it.

### **Drug testing is expensive**

In addition to the lab costs for each test, there are high costs for staffing to observe and administer each drug test, track each sample, and store all samples. Urine testing, which is most often used, must be directly observed in order to be accurate. Hair testing is much more expensive—3 to 4 times the cost of urine testing. Blood testing is not only expensive but is also invasive and requires skilled staff to draw blood and has tracking and storage costs as well.

Testing results in false positives—from over the counter cold medications, prescribed medications, and differences in individual metabolism—requiring re-testing, and more expense.

Other states—including New York, Maryland, Louisiana, and Iowa—have considered drug testing and decided not to do it for various reasons, including the high cost, because it is not effective, and because of concerns about constitutionality.

Idaho's Department of Health and Welfare was recently commissioned to study the financials of requiring tests and is in the process of reporting it would not save any money.

### **HB 1297 is duplicative—why pay twice for testing the same people?**

Most individuals with recent drug-related convictions are already being tested. They are under the supervision of the courts, or probation and parole, and are being tested as a condition of probation or parole. Many are in drug and alcohol treatment programs, which regularly test participants. There is no reason for taxpayers' money to be spent on testing them yet again.

People who are in active addiction typically do not receive welfare benefits, as they are more likely to miss appointments, do not stay on top of needed paperwork, do not comply with welfare to work assignments, and are more likely to break the rules.

### **HB 1297 does not provide for treatment**

The real problem in Pennsylvania is that we don't we have enough treatment programs to serve everyone who needs and wants treatment. Programs often have waiting lists. We have a shortage of programs for individuals with addictions and serious mental illness, and of programs for women. **HB 1297 not only does not address those problems, it doesn't even say that people who test positive should be referred for treatment!**

## **HB 1297 hurts victims of domestic violence and sexual assault**

Women's addictions often result from domestic violence or sexual abuse, when victims of abuse try to self-medicate their pain, in the absence of other resources.

Women who have been sexually or physically abused who have been beaten, raped or sexually assaulted can be re-traumatized by having to urinate in front of an observer. Drug testing may also deter victims of violence from applying for benefits they need to leave an abusive relationship or recover from assault.

## **HB 1297 hurts drug treatment programs**

HB 1297 denies benefits for an extended period if a woman tests positive, **even if she participates in treatment**. Drug addiction is a chronic, relapsing disease. Relapse is often a part of the recovery process, and treatment programs know how to respond to relapse effectively.

Denying women benefits hurts drug treatment programs, which need the benefits to house and feed women in treatment. It also hurts children, who are more likely to be placed in foster care, or need to stay longer in foster care, because their mothers cannot afford housing.

Taking away benefits—the additional strain of severe poverty—makes it harder for a woman to stay clean and to stay out of jail. As one woman put it, “now it matters because I’m trying to do the right thing.”

## **HB 1297 diverts attention from the real problems**

Studies have shown that the biggest barriers to employment for welfare recipients are physical and mental illness, disabilities, domestic violence, limited education and skills, and the need to care for children or other family members with disabilities. Pennsylvania should be addressing these real problems instead of throwing away money by duplicate testing for drug use.

## **There are better ways to address addictions.**

DPW already has a system in place to refer people who apply for or receive welfare benefits and who may have a drug or alcohol problem. They are referred to the experts in each county for assessment and treatment. **Individuals who do not participate in required treatment are not eligible for benefits under current law.**

**Let the experts—in the criminal justice system and in the drug and alcohol treatment system—do their jobs.**