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### **Helping Disadvantaged Men**

#### ***Summary of talk:***

A major problem for disadvantaged men is that they seldom work regularly.

We need expanded work programs if poor fathers are to work more regularly.

Higher wages are also needed but won't themselves produce more work.

Rather, we need "welfare reform for men"—a combination of new benefits like wage subsidies with better work enforcement.

Work programs should be linked to the child support and criminal justice systems.

Probably 1.2 million men in these systems are obligated to work yet are not doing so regularly.

We need expanded work programs to which these groups can be referred where work effort will be monitored more closely.

Evaluations suggest that such programs can help raise men's work levels if well implemented.

Child support work programs help enforce child support orders by helping judges determine whether men claiming inability to pay support are really jobless.

The referrals force men who are really working to admit unreported jobs and pay up.

If the men are really jobless, programs help them get a job.

Texas's NCP Choices is the leading example of such a program.

Men who fail to work and pay support are referred to the program by judges.

Texas Workforce Commission staff help the men get jobs, report no-shows, and follow up placements for six months.

Judges enforce compliance if men fail to participate.

Since 2005, NCP Choices has been implemented in most of the state.

An evaluation based on propensity score matching showed positive impacts on child support payments and employment.

But establishing the program took extensive statecraft.

Initially, judges were reluctant to enforce orders and TWC did not enforce work.

State officials persuaded both to accept these enforcement roles.

Child support and workforce officials designed NCP Choices together, then sold it to the legislature, on the basis that enhanced child support collections would help defray costs.

As in welfare reform, even with national leadership, states must create and implement their own work programs.

National policy should cautiously expand these programs.

Need somewhat more federal funding.

Perhaps \$2-\$3 billion a year to serve all low-income nonpayers.

Allow employment expenses to be matchable under Title IV-D.

Need further evaluations to establish impacts and resolve design issues.

Programs should enforce participation and stress work first.

They should also guarantee jobs, but how best to do this is unclear.

Only such programs can make the work expectation real “on the ground.”

***Relevant publications:***

Lawrence M. Mead, “And Now, ‘Welfare Reform’ for Men,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2007, p. A19.

Lawrence M. Mead, *Expanding Work Programs for Poor Men* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2011).

Lawrence M. Mead, “Toward a Mandatory Work Policy for Men,” *The Future of Children* 17, no. 2 (September 2007): 43-72.

Lawrence M. Mead, “Why We Need Work Programs for Fathers,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 610-16.

Lawrence M. Mead and Ron Haskins, “Restoring Work by Poor Fathers,” Center on Children and Families Brief #44 (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2011).