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January 9, 2003

**CONTACT:** Susan Frietsche  
412-227-0301  
David S. Cohen  
215-928-9801 x206  
WOMEN'S LAW  
PROJECT

Deb Beck  
717-652-9128  
DRUG AND ALCOHOL  
SERVICE PROVIDERS  
OF PENNSYLVANIA

Amy Hirsch  
215-227-2400 x2415  
COMMUNITY  
LEGAL SERVICES

**WOMEN'S GROUPS, DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAMS APPLAUD  
GOVERNOR SIGNING BILL ENDING LIFETIME BAN ON  
WELFARE BENEFITS**

Today, women's advocacy organizations joined drug treatment providers in praising Governor Ed Rendell for signing into law House Bill 44, a bill restoring eligibility for cash assistance and Food Stamps for people in recovery from drug addiction. Calling it "a beacon of hope," Women's Law Project Staff Attorney David S. Cohen explained that House Bill 44 would provide life-saving assistance to poor women who are currently unable to get welfare benefits because of an obscure provision of the 1996 federal welfare law.

"Federal law permanently bars anyone with a drug-related felony conviction committed after August 1996 from qualifying for federally-funded TANF cash assistance or Food Stamps for the rest of their lives," Cohen said. "The people this policy hurts are mostly women who are recovering from their addictions, who are in or have successfully completed drug treatment and are now trying to reunite with their children, and who

need a temporary safety net while they find employment and housing and get back on their feet.” He said that federal law permits states to opt out of the lifetime ban on benefits, and over thirty other states have already done so.

“It takes such enormous strength and courage to defeat an addiction,” commented Amy Hirsch of Community Legal Services in Philadelphia, author of a study of the federal ban on benefits entitled, *Some Days Are Harder Than Hard*, which found that most of the women affected by the ban on benefits are survivors of physical and/or sexual abuse whose addictions began in direct response to the violence they had suffered. “To deprive these women of the little bit of help they need for long-term recovery is completely senseless. It hurts the women, it hurts their children, and it hurts their communities.”

“The bill leaves in place a host of safeguards to prevent the misuse of welfare grant money by someone who may still be in active addiction and requires the welfare department to refer affected individuals for assessment and treatment if it is appropriate and available,” said Deb Beck, President of the Drug and Alcohol Services Providers Organization of Pennsylvania. “It simply gives these women the chance to make a new life for themselves and their children.”

The bill, which has enjoyed broad bipartisan support from the start, was sponsored by Democratic Representative Frank Oliver (D-195); an identical measure, Senate Bill 51, was sponsored by Senator Jane Earll. The bill was amended earlier this month in the Senate Appropriations Committee with a medical malpractice insurance measure sought by doctors which would abate MCARE payments. In addition to strong support from the drug treatment community, including the Drug and Alcohol Service Providers Organization of Pennsylvania, HB 44 has the support of the Pennsylvania District Attorney’s Association and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

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