

October 20, 2018

Governor Thomas Wolf
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf:

We are writing to urge you to veto SB 6. Community Legal Services of Philadelphia represents nearly 10,000 low-income people every year. The Women's Law Project is devoted to protecting and advancing the rights of women and girls across Pennsylvania. Every day, both our organizations work with survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse, women in recovery from addiction, and families who depend on Cash Assistance and Food Stamps to help make ends meet. SB 6 will harm those women and their families.

We deeply appreciate all you have done to help survivors of abuse, to strengthen Pennsylvania's safety net, and to fight the opioid crisis and now we urgently need you to protect vulnerable Pennsylvanians once again. SB 6 will not only undermine the good work you've done, but also hurt many of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable families.

We believe that the amendment to the bill, while it was well intentioned, unfortunately did not address some of the most troubling provisions. In its final form the bill still places difficult barriers on vulnerable individuals needing help, imposes burdensome verification requirements on families and individuals, and reverses decades of good policy.

SB 6 would add more red tape for cash assistance applicants and (depending on what happens with the federal Farm Bill) SNAP applicants. Since 1995, Pennsylvania recognized that people need a car to get to work and that verifying the value of poor Pennsylvanians' cars is needless red tape. It's senseless to make it harder for PA families to get the benefits they need because of baseless claims that benefit recipients drive high-value cars. Requiring individuals to submit, and DHS to confirm, verification of the value of a car will result in eligible families losing benefits not because of the actual value of their car, but because of the difficulty of submitting and tracking paperwork. County Assistance Offices already have difficulty properly processing and tracking paperwork, and more items to verify will only make that worse.

SB 6 includes a **\$100 replacement fee the second time a person loses their EBT card**--the card used for food stamps and cash assistance. Families who do not have enough money to buy groceries cannot afford to pay this exorbitant fee. The fee applies even if the card is stolen. While there are some protections in federal law (referenced by the amendment), they will not necessarily protect recipients of General Assistance, who would be forced to pay **half their monthly income** if they are mugged or if an abuser steals the card. This is particularly an issue for individuals who are



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homeless; being homeless makes it extraordinarily difficult to avoid being robbed and to hold onto your belongings.

SB 6 also imposes a new set of rules on women in recovery who have drug convictions. The bill partially repeals a sensible bipartisan reform from 2003 that lifted a cruel lifetime ban for cash assistance. Now, SB 6 will make certain women ineligible for TANF or GA cash assistance for ten years after a second drug conviction, and require those with a single drug conviction to submit to ten years of drug testing. If an individual fails two drug tests, even if she continues drug treatment, SB 6 imposes a ten-year ban on cash assistance. Experts know that recovery from addiction includes relapse, and treatment programs know how to respond effectively to relapse. Many women's drug convictions result from self-medicating the pain of sexual abuse, domestic violence, or human trafficking. SB 6 will make it harder for these women to rebuild their families and move forward with their lives.

SB6 is wholly inconsistent with the Wolf Administration's comprehensive efforts to address the opioid crisis and provide wraparound services to people in recovery, including those reentering society from the criminal justice system. While SB6 permits DHS to determine when implementation of this particular section of the bill is cost effective, and your administration could choose not to implement it, the provision would remain in effect for a future administration to act on unless you veto the bill.

While SB6 is facially limited to convictions for larger quantities of drugs, **state criminal records databases do not include drug quantity**, and SB 6 will therefore make it very difficult for women whose convictions were for even very small amounts to establish eligibility.

Finally, SB6 disproportionately increases the grading for small amounts of welfare fraud—making \$1,000 a felony offense rather than a misdemeanor. This will make it much harder for individuals to ever get employment, and to do the right thing after completing a sentence.

SB 6 does not make us safer. Its provisions on sex offenders are duplicative of pre-existing federal and state law. What it does instead is feed into the worst stereotypes of poor people, and make it harder for poor women to care for themselves and their families.

Please ensure that Pennsylvanians can get the help they need by vetoing SB6. Thank you.



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