

Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020

Group 3: Removing barriers

Discussion Summary from July 21, 2008

The Working Group met to begin addressing the policy ideas that were brainstormed during the last session. To organize our work, the group first consolidated the six broad headings from the last meeting into three main areas and reorganized subpoints accordingly (see below). Issues that didn't fit into any of those headings (or "buckets") were set aside in the "parking lot" for future consideration.

Participants also considered some draft "criteria for evaluating policy proposals" provided by Gregory Gray. These criteria were useful throughout our discussion to help ensure that our ideas would have the desired impact, be "actionable" by the Legislature and/or Executive Branch leaders, and would get to a scale that would fulfill the Commission's mandate. Finally, other resources were discussed – reports and material on benefit cliffs, racial bias, and gender bias. These materials will be distributed/posted on the Commission web site.

To address barriers to ending poverty, the working group suggests policy proposals in three broad areas. Under each of the following headings are specific policy ideas to be explored further. The group's work was then captured as follows (numbers in parentheses reference ideas as they were organized from the 6/3/08 summary).

A. It is necessary to change broad attitudes (and institutions and structures) regarding people in poverty. Minnesota can do so by:

- Promoting care-giving roles for family and community members as a strategy for building support networks and ensuring stability for those around us (A2). The bottom line message is: "if you can give help, you give it."
- Using updated court studies to implement changes in state institutions where racial or gender bias ultimately contributes to individuals moving into, or being hindered from moving out of, poverty (B1).
- Promoting a broad expectation among Minnesotans that the state will do its part to support those in need; and, that individuals who present themselves for help truly need the help. The bottom line message is: "if you need help, you get it" (D6).

B. Intervention strategies should support and strengthen family- and community-centered caregiving as a first step; with other strategies (like paid state staff as case managers) as the next step. To transform our intervention strategies, Minnesota will:

- Develop a “mental health first aid” training that can be widely implemented in communities (A1).
- Ensure that service interventions include the identification of an advocate for those seeking services and provide training, support, and information for those identified advocates (who may be family/community members or paid professionals) (A2). Also noted in this was that it is useful for people to see “advocates in action” so they can learn to emulate that same effort.
- Address criminal barriers [*not sure what we meant here*]
- Work to ensure that marriage and family counseling are available and accessible to all – particularly through insurance plans, etc. (E1)
- Address financial disincentives for family and community care giving – particularly the current disparities in compensating family members v. foster children and other examples. Consider tax credit or other financial incentives for family caregivers and make it commensurate with other paid care (E4)

C. Our service systems must be geared toward individual and family success. Services and supports are the vehicles by which individuals and families move out of poverty; so those services must be accessible to those seeking assistance. Minnesota will ensure that services and supports are accessible by:

- Removing complexity and duplication in our public support application and service processes (D1) and be mindful of how individuals navigate through systems in search of service.
- Addressing asset limits that keep people from getting needed services, particularly health care and housing [be mindful of geography – e.g., you need a working car to get around in rural Minnesota] (D2).
- Synchronizing asset limits and eligibility requirements across state-managed programs (Per Arnie's examples).
- Addressing employment barriers for individuals – ensuring that they have the tools needed to be successful in the labor market.

Issues "Parked" for future consideration

- Often, current practice in the child protection system exacerbates mental health issues and stresses among families.
- How to support care-giving roles – for all people? If we monetize the rewards, it makes for easier comparability; but may also be more difficult politically. We need to be mindful of the concentration of poverty among women – and the relationship to traditional caregiving roles.
- Are we ensuring a base income for all Minnesota families?
- Need to do more outreach and getting information out regarding expectations of success and eligibility for services and support.
- Be mindful of life transitions (illness, incarceration, divorce, teen to adult) – this is where people fall through the cracks and generate need for assistance.

Additional resource offered by Commission research staff

Research staff provided some examples of public systems in which services are provided without significant front-end eligibility checks and more back-end verification. These included:

- light rail transit (you purchase tickets and there are random checks, but you could utilize transit without paying);
- voting system (you sign an oath that you are who you say you are and live where you say you live, but proof not required at voting booth)
- data practices – all government data is presumed public unless there is specific statutory language that makes it private.
- you used to have to provide proof of insurance to get license tabs, now it is not needed.

In discussion, meeting participants also suggested that:

- Our criteria (B1) to ensure that institutional bias does not do more to put people in poverty could be applied to all the Commission's recommendations
- Our criteria could be expanded to ensure we are addressing items from Section F in the 6/3/08 notes that focus on eliminating bias regarding race, gender, and culture.
- The Commission ensures that its processes engage as many as possible among those who will be affected by its work.

Finally, participants agreed upon a few next steps:

1. Staff will consolidate notes from this meeting, wordsmithing some of the categories and recommendations for discussion next time.
2. The work group will schedule up to three more meetings to develop recommendations to bring back to the full Commission.
3. Staff will ensure that work group members are kept apprised of progress in other work groups so that effort is not duplicated.
4. The work group will consider creating a "portfolio" of recommendations in each of the above categories – with the idea that it is the effect of the full portfolio to be considered, and perhaps less so the impact of each individual policy recommendation.

With thanks to all who participated, the meeting was then adjourned.