

Drug testing for welfare

[Health & Medicine](#), [Drugs](#)



The Push for Drug Testing of Welfare Recipients United States lawmakers face one of the most pressing issues of our time-welfare reform. New screening processes, often considered a direct violation of constitutional rights, have already been enacted in many states. Strong evidence exists, asserting that the practice of administering drug testing to welfare recipients will cost the U. S. taxpayers more money in the long run, stigmatize applicants and participants, and serve only the purpose of making the pharmaceutical companies more powerful.

In order to protect the constitutional rights of potential welfare recipients, United States lawmakers should avoid further criminalizing the poor by submitting them to drug testing and/or a nationwide welfare registry. This year, 29 states have either proposed or already passed legislation calling for drug testing to receive welfare benefits. Brian Kelley reports that of those 29 states, several are seeing a great deal of financial loss as a result of this legislation: During the past year, the state of Utah has spent over \$30, 000 giving drug tests to welfare recipients.

In that time period, only 2. 6 percent of those tested were found to have used illegal substances ” well below the national use rate of 8. 9 percent (1). Kelley goes on to report: In 2012, three years and 87, 000 screenings later, only one person had failed a drug test. Total savings from denying that one person benefits? \$560. Total benefits paid out in that time? \$200 million. Even if we include the savings from cutting benefits to the 1, 633 people who didn't return the pre-test survey, it brings the total to only 0. percent of the amount distributed over that period (1). The numbers do not lie” little evidence exists that supports the claim that drug testing recipients will save

money. Striving to prove that the main source of the drug problem in the United States lies in the recipients of the welfare program, policymakers continue to work fervently. The overgeneralization of the poor as drug users has become common practice in Washington. Lawmakers seem to feel that because recipients receive government funding, they in turn give up their constitutional rights as U. S. citizens.

The practice of criminalizing the poor has become commonplace in the creation of U. S. governmental policy. Karen Gustafson is someone who knows a lot about the criminalization of the poor. She has spent much of her time researching and writing about just that. According to Gustafson, "The public desire to deter and punish welfarecheating has overwhelmed the will to provide economic security to vulnerable members of society (644). " Because of the misuse of welfare funds by a few, the entire underprivileged population has been targeted as criminals" as lazy, drug abusing sponges.

Over the past several decades, the United States government has spent billions of dollars in an effort to catch and prosecute those who are abusing the welfare system. This practice is necessary in order to rid the welfare system of abusers. However, often overlooked is the fact that there are many recipients who are not drug users and are still in need of aid. It is the duty of the U. S. government to provide aid without encouraging potential participants to feel like they are being considered as potential criminals from the very beginning of the application process.

The cross-agency process involved in the welfare and criminal Justice systems is unconstitutional and an invasion of the privacy of the American

underprivileged. As welfare reform began to take place so did the social misconception that recipients are criminals did as well. In fact, welfare recipients often receive the same treatment as parolees and probationers. This is in part due to the fact that too many law enforcement techniques are embedded in the welfare system.

Gustafson tells us: Her social security number has been matched against state and national criminal records The financial information she has provided has been matched against various employment databases, IRS records, and Franchise Tax Board records Her personal information has been entered into the welfare system's database, which may be accessed by law enforcement officers without any basis for suspicion All f this has occurred before she has received a single welfare check (645). There is no doubt that those Americans in need of assistance have been subjected to unconstitutional treatment by the welfare program.

As a result of the criminal actions of a few, all of the needy are being unfairly scrutinized. The implementation of unfounded drug testing in addition to the already criminalizing application process will only serve to further stigmatize the needy” and all in the name of the mighty dollar. Some believe that it is not the quest to save money that is the driving force behind the push for this legislation. Rather, it is a desire to make millions for the pharmaceutical companies that lawmakers are seeking to achieve.

Lobbyist interference from multi-million dollar pharmaceutical companies has heavily influenced Washington lawmakers' policymaking. These pharmaceutical companies have their hand in much of the United States

lawmaking practice. These powerful corporations stand to make a lot of money from the sale of drug testing supplies and services to the U. S. government. Macdonald reports: several Republican lawmakers in Congress have pushed hard for the mandatory drug testing of anyone, anywhere, applying for welfare.

Leading the charge in the senate is Orrin Hatch who received \$8, 000 campaign contributions in 2012 from the political action committee of Laboratory Corporation of America (LabCorp), \$3000 from another political action committee to which LabCorp contributes, as well as \$4000 in campaign contributions from another company with major interests in drug testing, Abbott Laboratories (15). According to Macdonald, Orrin Hatch is not the only lawmaker with these corporations in his pocket. " GOP Congressman Charles Boustany received \$1 5, 000 from Abbott Laboratories (15).

The fact that Congressmen and women are receiving contributions from pharmaceutical companies is disturbing to say the least. The American underprivileged do not stand a chance at ever overcoming their circumstances as long as lawmakers continue to be driven by greed, rather than their best interest. If United States lawmakers really had the best interest of the underprivileged in mind, they would be focusing fewer resources on treating those who test positive for substance abuse and more on the underlying mental and physical causes for the abuse.

Pollack tells us, " Even among women who reported recent illicit substance abuse, depression, physical health problems and limited education were actually more common barriers to self-sufficiency and social functioning(2) "

Pollack and Turner states, " Most welfare recipients [.] were casual marijuana users who didn't meet screening criteria for marijuana (or other substance use) disorders. Ironically, chemical testing technologies were most sensitive to identifying marijuana users who rarely needed addiction services (2). Mental and physical disabilities and the lack of healthcare are often the underlying cause of drug use to begin with as a means of self-medication. These issues receive far too little attention in the U. S. government policy decisions, unlike that of drug use. Pollack's research outlines the statistical data on illicit drug use as it compares to mental and physical health problems: However one runs the numbers, illicit drug use disorders are not common among welfare recipients. Other physical and mental health problems are far more prevalent.