

# Free research paper on should welfare recipients be drug tested

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## Introduction

Welfare program is aimed at helping that sector of the society that earns nothing or less than the minimum limit specified by the state government. For the last decade there is a heated debate raging among all the states if these welfare recipients must be drug tested before they start getting the benefit from the states. It is not easy to come to a conclusion. Drug testing will definitely ensure that tax payer's money is not getting into the wrong hands but on the flip side execution of drug testing for all the people who apply for welfare benefits will cost additional money from the tax payers. In this paper I will try to establish how drug testing for welfare recipients will not benefit the society as a whole and also not save the money of the tax payers.

Welfare programs are state regulated programs to help the needy and downtrodden. The state determines if a person is eligible for welfare program based on the following criterion:

- If a family is not skilled enough to enter into any job position or if there is not enough job opportunity as a whole.
- The head of the family will commit to self-sufficiency. This means that the state and heads of the household come into an agreement that the family of the welfare recipients will become self-sufficient within a limited timeframe. The assumption here is if the heads of the family can get into some kind of job during the given timeframe then that experience will help them bag better jobs and sustain their families.

There are several other clauses like the recipient of a welfare program must be at least 18 years old and he must be a legal resident of the state. Once a

person or a family is identified as recipients of welfare program, they receive the following benefits.

Temporary Income to Needy Families (TANF) will help the recipients with monthly cash so that they can sustain a minimum level of lifestyle. The main purpose is that this money can be used to take care of the children and elderly in the family. Child support program will ensure the partial or fully paid child care so that heads of the families can work or obtain job training. The welfare program also ensures utility assistance which intends to pay for the basic utility needs like heat, water and electricity.

Welfare recipients are paid by the state government. The money comes from the taxes collected from people. The major concern over the welfare program for last few decades is that the tax payer's money is going into wrong hands. Many politicians have implied that a multitude of families under the welfare program are abusing the money. First of all, in many of those households the heads of the families are either drug addicts or occasional consumers of drugs. This means that the tax payer's money is wasted on drug addicts instead of helping needy families. Secondly, it has been stated by many people that many of the welfare families receive child care benefit and school going allowance but the children go to school occasionally and indulge in anti-social and other kinds of wrongful activities. In this case also the tax payer's money for child care program is wasted on children who almost never show up in school.

Florida is one of the states which tried to implement drug testing for welfare recipients long time back. They implemented this for the first time in 1999 to 2001 before it was scrapped and again they started it in 2011 before a state

ruling halted it. During the ruling a survey was conducted for four months. During that time 4, 086 people applied for welfare benefits and they all were scheduled for drug test. 108 people among 4, 086 failed the test which is about 2. 6% of the total number of people applied. The most common drug addiction found was marijuana. Only 30 people chose not to take the test and cancel it. The cost of taking an average drug test varies between \$30 to \$37. It costs the state a total of \$118, 140 for those tests. That money is more than the probable monetary payout as benefit to those families. Further research shows that the drug testing did not reduce the number of people who applied for welfare during that period. (Lizette, NY Times, 2012) The basic assumption behind enforcing a drug test was that many of the welfare recipients or poor people are drug addicts and if this drug testing criterion is put in place then it will reduce the number of applicants especially those who are regular drug users. This will save money for the state.

However, this seems not to be true from the statistics above found in Florida. Only 2. 6% of the total number of people who applied for welfare benefits was found to be drug addicts. National institute of Drug Abuse conducted a survey among school students irrespective of their background and found that a whopping 25% of the 12th graders have used or are using illicit drugs. Even more surprising is the fact that almost 7. 7% of those started using drug as early as 7th grade (Monitoring the future, NIH, Dec-2012). These figures do clearly say that drug abuse is not very concentrated among the poor or needy class; rather it is a national problem for people of all ages. Drug testing can be more of a random affair based on suspicion for all and

not limited to welfare applicants. In another survey conducted by Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency, it is found that drug abuse is lower among recipients of welfare benefits than among the total population. If we go by statistics then the claims of some of the political corners that they can save millions in the state by introducing this law will be a total opposite. In fact states like Florida, Indiana, and Michigan spend millions of dollars per year for drug testing and only save in thousands or in many cases lose in millions.

It is also argued that people who actually are drug users will not apply for the welfare benefits if this law is in place and only right people will get the benefits. This will save a lot of money and taxpayer's money will go in right hands. Again if we go by the above studies then we can say that even this is not true. If we have only less than 3% of the welfare recipients as drug users then it will cost more for the state to execute drug test on all the applicants than paying those 3%. Florida study conducted in 2001 and also the one which was conducted in 2011 (stated above) shows that the number of applicants never went down due to enforcement of this law.

The argument that the tax payer's money should not be used for benefitting the drug abusers is infallible. The problem is the basic assumption that most of the drug users come from poor and needy families rather than the middle class society or the rich people. In fact drug abuse is less among welfare recipients and it is logical as well. If they need to choose between drugs and food they in most of the cases will choose food over drugs. However, the wealthier classes have the luxury of affording both. Also, why will only welfare recipients be singled out for drug testing? Why not the drug and alcohol test is done on politicians weekly? They are representing the state

and its people so they also should be sober all the time to be able to take good decisions for its people. Drug testing for welfare applicants for me should only be carried out when it is found through surveys and established that drug usage is very high among them. Till that time we should not enforce a law based on an assumption of few politicians and media houses.

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