

Call for work requirements reveals bias against low-income families, could hurt many needing help the most

Policymakers should heed [Catherine Rampell's Oct. 19 op-ed](#) probing the harm that paid work requirements for child tax credits could do to families headed by elderly low-income parents. Many other low-income families could experience similar issues particularly if work requirements are politically motivated and not carefully crafted.

For years, high-income families in the U.S. have netted billions of dollars through a [child tax deduction](#) with no paid work requirement for parents staying at home to take care of their kids. Now that Congress has temporarily extended this benefit to low-income families via a refundable tax credit, work requirements are suddenly a big political issue.

Work does not have to be paid to have value to a society. In the bigger picture, total national work = paid work + unpaid work which includes raising children.

Do Sen. Manchin and others think low-income families will put less effort into raising their kids than higher-income because they also can get some aid from the government? Do they fear people will quit paid jobs if they get a stipend to help with child expenses? Are they worried swarms of "welfare queens" might reappear in the nation's urban ghettos and trailer parks to embarrass them in the headlines?

If lawmakers decide to add a paid work mandate to curtail possible abuse, it could be adjusted to require only part-time employment for low-income single parent households, which by definition have the hardest time earning a living wage. Alternatively, low-income parents facing work requirements could be provided adequate subsidies for childcare, which the current tax credits amounting to \$3K-\$3.6K a year are insufficient to cover. How can single parents work outside the home if they can't afford childcare?

If low-income parents must work outside the home to get child tax credits, why shouldn't higher-income parents? In the end, most of any subsidy for raising the nation's kids should flow to low-income families that need it rather than to higher-income families that don't. Our national debt is too high and economic inequality too pronounced for the government to be able to provide broad-based social insurance for everything.

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Conflicts: study economic inequality, advocate on behalf of the “bottom 50%”