

Dads Need Help Too

Katie McMinn Campbell and Will Marshall of the Progressive Policy Institute introduce their new proposal

House Ways and Means Chairman Charles Rangel is for it, so are the leading Democratic presidential contenders and progressive policy shops. All want to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which since the 1990s has emerged as America's most potent weapon against poverty.

President Clinton's 1993 expansion of the credit, in combination with welfare reform and a strong economy, helped move millions of poor mothers from dependence to work. Now reformers want to expand the credit for low-income *men* who work fulltime and take responsibility for the children they bring into the world.

When it comes to work, poor men and women are headed in opposite directions. According to researcher Lawrence Mead, only about half of all poor men work, and just 16 percent of them work full time. A mere 6 percent of poor black men work full time. The resulting dearth of responsible, breadwinning fathers in low-income neighborhoods undermines marriage, deprives kids of positive male role models and leaves single moms strapped for cash. That's why getting more men into full-time work is a critical step in tackling both the economic and cultural dimensions of poverty in America.

In our recent report, [Making Work Pay, For Men Too](#), we propose a plan similar to Rangel's that would increase EITC benefits for childless workers and fathers who do not have custody of their children. Specifically we recommend:

- Boosting EITC benefits for noncustodial dads, so long as they work full time and meet their child-support obligations.
- Simplifying the maze of tax credits for which low-income families and individuals are eligible. Specifically, we would fold the EITC, the child credit, and the child and dependent care credit into a single, turbo-charged "family tax credit."

The new family tax credit would provide 4 million noncustodial fathers and childless workers a work bonus of \$1,236 - nearly three times what they currently receive in EITC benefits. And it would soften the EITC's marriage penalty by raising the qualifying income thresholds for two-earner couples.

Welfare reform worked because it expanded opportunity while also demanding responsibility. To renew progress against poverty, we should once again make work pay—this time for men.