

North Carolina bill requires background checks for public assistance

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In a 106-6 vote April 11, North Carolina's House approved a bill that will require background checks for those seeking welfare assistance and food stamps, to "protect the integrity of the programs," according to legislators. The move follows by just days similar legislation enacted in Texas.

In another punitive measure aimed against workers and the poor, the Arkansas Senate approved a measure April 8 that would require random drug testing of residents who receive state unemployment benefits.

State representative Dean Arp, the North Carolina bill's sponsor, stated that county offices need to do more to keep recipients with pending warrants or felony charges from receiving state aid. According to Arp, "This would save the state money by making sure that aid goes to those law-abiding citizens first, those who need it." Arp's statement makes clear the fact that both North Carolina's House and Arkansas's Senate are only interested in bailing out the economy at the expense of those who have suffered the most.

Lori Ann Harris, the lobbyist for the North Carolina Association of County Boards and Social Services, worries that the new procedure will dissuade families who require assistance from seeking it in affected agencies, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Food and Nutrition Services.

Harris stated in an interview, "We sort of consider ourselves as help for people. If people think they are going to be prosecuted or even arrested for even seeking our services, that's a big concern for us."

Harris also asked bill supporters about the cost of such a requirement and who will be responsible for paying for background checks for the 1.8 million people currently receiving assistance in North Carolina. Lawmakers gave no response before approving the measure and sending it to the state Senate. Harris stated

that the county offices are strapped. "We cannot afford an unfunded mandate," she said.

This sheds light on the possibility that the applicants themselves might have to pay for background checks in order to receive assistance. When Florida passed a law requiring welfare recipients to take drug tests, those recipients had to pay for the testing themselves. This means that those who are already suffering and surviving on very little may be forced to give up more in order to even apply for assistance.

While great opposition has arisen in the North Carolina legislature over the notion of requiring background checks for those seeking to purchase firearms, similar outrage over a requirement that the poor be subjected to background checks did not arise. The bill passed the House with more than 94 percent approval.

Ultimately, this process will serve to frighten those poor families with hungry children from applying for benefits. Such measures serve to further polarize the rich and poor, transferring more wealth into the top echelons of society. Wall Street banks that nearly crippled the economy in 2008 received billions of federal bailout dollars. Rather than targeting such criminal actions, politicians are instead setting their sights on the destitute and the unemployed.



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