

“For Such a Time as This” Pray. Fast. Act.

EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

“Our particular calling in education is two-fold: to educate people in the Christian faith for their vocation and to strive with others to ensure that all have access to high quality education that develops personal gifts and abilities and serves the common good.”

[ELCA social statement: “Our Calling in Education” \(2007\)](#)

On March 15, Heather Hahn of the [Urban Institute provided testimony](#) to the House Committee on Higher Education and the Workforce on the issue of work requirements and welfare programs. In her testimony, she provided analysis that found that 80 percent of able-bodied adults receiving assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program were either working or between jobs. Her analysis found that low-skill and low-wage work has become increasingly unstable and unpredictable – resulting in families cycling on and off programs or earning wages so low they need assistance even while working.

Cyclical poverty is a problem faced by millions of Americans. [One study found that of those who manage to work themselves above the poverty line, 36 percent were back in poverty](#) within four years. It is most pronounced among the working poor, who cannot access education and training because they need a paycheck to feed their family, and often there are too few educational opportunities accessible to them. Because many do not have higher levels of training for skilled trades that earn more, they can barely afford to feed their families. This cycle can trap Americans in poverty for multiple generations, as [research shows the longer one spends in poverty the lower your chances of moving up](#).

While some in Congress have proposed adding requirements that the working poor must be working to receive assistance, this bureaucratic red tape will not help lift families out of cyclical poverty. Breaking the cycle of poverty means we must invest in education – from early childhood to trade schools and community colleges. As the economy grows and changes, millions of jobs with family-supporting wages are available. Unfortunately, these jobs require some level of specialized training or certification, such as information technology, welding, automotd manufacturing, plumbing and many more.

To help the working poor, Congress must invest in programs that support people while they study and make educational and training resources more effective and accessible. In doing so, we will empower people to eventually not need government assistance because they will have jobs that pay enough to save money and provide greater opportunities to their children. Investing in education, and the programs that support and make it possible for adults and parents to gain an education, is the only way for our nation to truly help the poor – and in doing so reduce long-term demands for welfare spending.

To prepare our children to succeed, address historical injustices and ensure a stable foundation for the national economy, education and workforce development must be prioritized in the allocation of the additional \$18 billion in fiscal year 2019 funding. These investments will make primary education more comprehensive, secondary and higher education more accessible, and training in the skills necessary for family-supporting wages attainable.

