

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Senate Committee on Finance today passed its own version of a bill that would reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program shortly after members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) submitted letters to the Chair and the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Finance that highlighted issues of vital concern to minority groups affected by TANF reauthorization.

Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 30), the only congressional member from Southern California who is on the House Ways and Means Committee, which oversees TANF, was among the original authors of the letters and played an instrumental role in attaining many of the 42 congressional signatories from the three caucuses.

The letters urged the Senate to adopt certain provisions to address issues pertaining to childcare, civil rights and the restoration of benefits for legal permanent residents, among others. "This nation needs welfare reform that lifts people out of poverty, treats recipients fairly and equally, and puts them on a path to sustain a living wage for themselves and their families," the letter reads. "Welfare reform measures should not punish racial and ethnic minorities attempting to better themselves."

The House of Representatives passed its own version of TANF reauthorization back on May 16. Rep. Becerra voted against the legislation citing concerns that the bill inadequately funded childcare, failed to empower TANF recipients through education and training opportunities, and treated legal permanent residents unfairly. The full Senate is due to take up the legislation in mid-July.

The legislation that passed in the Finance Committee today includes restoration of health care services for pregnant legal immigrant women and children (under Medicaid and SCHIP) and full TANF benefits for legal permanent residents.

"The legislation that passed the House back in May failed to provide the tools to enable people to work themselves out of poverty," Rep. Becerra said. "Instead, it created an unworkable system that ignored the realities facing the working poor. For example, while the legislation intended to combat poverty, it continued to prevent immigrants from receiving work supports available to others even though poverty is known to be acute in the immigrant community. I applaud the Senate for doing the right thing today by giving legal permanent residents in this country the tools they need to become self-sufficient. I look forward to working with the Senate to craft a sensible, compassionate TANF reauthorization bill that will empower people to leave not just welfare, but poverty altogether."