

Welfare reform worked, just not for the people who need welfare

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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This week marks the 15th anniversary of welfare reform, in which a Republican Congress and a re-election-focused Democratic president got together to fulfill the latter's promise to "end welfare as we know it."

Certainly the new law accomplished this: it replaced the [old welfare program](#) with a [welfare-to-work alternative](#) administered by the states, and it significantly reduced the number of people on the rolls. But has it done well by the poor?

Not so much. This [short piece](#) by Rakim Brooks does an excellent job explaining why. He begins:

The anniversary of welfare reform is a fitting occasion to consider how opinion can trump fact and bias policy. The problem with "ending welfare as we knew it" was that it did not end or meaningfully reduce poverty, nor did it secure a decent standard of living for struggling Americans. The poor are still poor, and now they have neither a hand-up nor a hand-out.

[Read it all](#). The gist: the poor need jobs, not incentives to look for them. Yet some conservatives continue to [attack federal anti-poverty programs](#) on the premise that they promote a culture of dependency. Meanwhile, our culture of *not having enough jobs to go around* continues unabated.

In another example of opinion trumping fact, Florida has been drug-testing welfare applicants, a controversial move based in part on Gov. Rick Scott's assertion that they are especially likely to be using. But the state's [findings](#) contradict this: just 2 percent of applicants test positive.

~~The state does, however, oblige all 100 percent to pay for their own testing.~~

[CORRECTION: The state does, however, oblige all 100 percent to pay up front for their testing. Those who test negative \(i.e., almost all of them\) are reimbursed, but they still have the burden of coming up with the cash in the first place. This is](#)

apparently less offensive than the possibility that a few people might get welfare benefits despite having recently scored some weed.