

Legislature, I'm going to try to put these things that I think are involved in this question together in a way that is coherent because I may not have explained it very well before. Currently the law allows women to a year before they participate in these activities. When this bill was drafted, the amount was cut in half. It was cut from a year to six months. Then another wrinkle was put in. If a child is born more than 9 months after the woman goes on welfare, that child gets the benefit of only 12 weeks, 12 weeks. It drops from a year to 12 weeks. There was a police chief or a former chief who was saying he thought the greatest thing in the world would be if a mother could spend five years with her child before having to leave the home. We know that is not going to happen in many instances. Under the present law not all women on welfare have to participate in these activities after 12 weeks. If the child was born within that window, nine months plus a few days, that mother has the six months. If the child is born a day later it drops to six weeks. The value of the mother staying with the child does not diminish, it does not change, it does not alter because the child was born or will be born tomorrow instead of today. It gives the situation kind of a stark appearance if you lay it beside what we often indicate in terms of children being in need of certain things during those first few weeks and months of life. If it is a developmental and a bonding period, we should make that possible whenever we can. If the mother had a job as Senator Rasmussen pointed out where maternity leave is allowed, the requirements of the job would prevail. But we're dealing with a woman who doesn't have a job. If you say, as Senator Beutler and others have, that anything you offer a woman makes it better to be on welfare than not, then why don't you take away insurance coverage, too, because a lot of women who are out there working don't have insurance. Take the insurance coverage, a lot of them don't have food stamps so take that also and say you're going to take a woman with nothing and equate her situation with that of a woman who has a job. It would be like saying we're going to give the same examination to a child who has been to school and one who hasn't and the one who does better is somehow of a higher order than the one who didn't have the opportunity to go to school. Women want decent jobs as everybody wants a decent job. If there were an opportunity for full and meaningful employment, not only problems of welfare, but problems of crime and other antisocial conduct would be diminished tremendously. It will never be completely eradicated. But because of a lack of economic wherewithal, there are many things people do which ordinarily they would not.