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**ARIZONANS ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH STATE'S NEW WELFARE PROGRAM,
YET SUPPORT ITS MAJOR PROVISIONS**

Over three-fourths of adults in Arizona have not heard about Arizona's new welfare reform program--EMPOWER, according to a recent statewide telephone survey. Most residents of the state, however, approve of EMPOWER's major reforms, including time limits on welfare benefits, no increases in assistance for additional children, work requirements, and the elimination of legal immigrants who are not citizens from the welfare rolls.

The telephone survey was conducted between February 20 and March 1, 1997, by the Social Research Laboratory at Northern Arizona University. Four hundred and two randomly selected Arizonans participated in the survey, and the results are accurate at a +/- 5 percent margin of error with a 95 percent confidence level.

STATE-CONTROLLED BLOCK GRANT FUNDING SUPPORTED

EMPOWER stands for Employing and Moving People Off Welfare and Encouraging Responsibility. The program started in 1995 and is funded through a fixed amount of money in a

block grant sent to Arizona from the U.S. Congress. EMPOWER replaces the Aid to Families with Dependent Children welfare program (AFDC), an entitlement program which provided cash assistance and other services to poor families without regard for the total amount spent in a given year. The amount of money spent on welfare under AFDC was based on the number of families who needed assistance and met requirements set forth in Arizona and Washington. The total amount of money now spent on EMPOWER is limited by the total amount included in the state's block grant.

Almost three-fourths of Arizonans (71%) support the switch from an entitlement to a block grant program. Levels of support dip to a low of 65 percent among lower-income residents.

According to Fred Solop, director of the survey, "When the number of families officially in poverty rises in Arizona, the State Legislature will have less money to allocate under EMPOWER because needy families are no longer entitled to assistance and the amount allocated under the block grant is fixed. Some previously eligible welfare recipients may not qualify for temporary cash assistance."

Among the more than one-fourth of state residents who disapprove of the change to block grants, 67 percent prefer that welfare be changed back to an entitlement program. Women are more likely to prefer this change than men (74% vs. 59%, respectively).

SUPPORT FOR TIME LIMITS ON ASSISTANCE

Although Arizonans have not heard much about EMPOWER, they support the major reforms included in the new welfare program. Three-fourths of the state (74%) support the provision limiting adults to two years of assistance in any five-year period, with a life-time limit

of five years of welfare assistance. Support for this provision is equally high among women and men and people at all income levels.

Among the one-fourth of the population that does not approve of time limits for receiving benefits, less than half (45%) are willing to abolish the limits entirely.

LITTLE SUPPORT FOR MORE BENEFITS WITH ADDITIONAL CHILDREN; STRONG SUPPORT FOR WORK REQUIREMENT

Arizona's EMPOWER program does not increase a family's benefits if the mother has additional children. This rule is supported by almost three-fourths of Arizonans (73%). Sixty-nine percent of lower-income residents support this rule. Among those who do not support this provision, nearly two-thirds (62%) want the amount of cash assistance to be increased when the mother has additional children

"Support for not increasing benefits for more children many spring from the myth that women have children just to increase their welfare benefits," Solop said, "even though this myth is not supported by research."

Most everyone in Arizona supports EMPOWER's work requirements. Ninety-five percent of state residents approve of the provision that all able-bodied welfare recipients be required to work as a condition of receiving benefits. Support for this provision was very strong among both women and men and individuals from families at all income levels.

Levels of support for work requirements are consistent with the results of a public opinion poll conducted by the Lab a year and a half ago when the EMPOWER provisions went into effect. At that time, 89 percent of the statewide sample favored a proposal requiring that people either work or volunteer full-time to receive some welfare benefits.

MODERATE SUPPORT FOR ELIMINATING BENEFITS TO LEGAL IMMIGRANTS

Under EMPOWER, legal immigrants who are not citizens are no longer eligible for welfare benefits and food stamps in Arizona. This restriction is supported by just 55 percent of the state's residents, making this the most controversial rule of the EMPOWER program. Eighty percent of women who disapprove of these cuts want the benefits restored, and the same is true for 72 percent of the men who did not support these cuts.