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WEEL

EXHIBIT 19
DATE 1-21-05

The drastic cuts to TANF cash benefits in 2003 have led to many of Montana's most vulnerable families enduring a full blown crisis, not able to meet their basic needs. The families whose benefits were cut are now in an even more dramatic and dangerous struggle to take care of their children. Many families that I work with at WEEL can now pay only half of their bills every month. This means that instead of making their way out of poverty, they are plunging further into debt, deciding which of their family's basic needs are the most important, which service is in the most danger of being turned off. *And these are the families that I can still locate.*

~~Only the most desperately poor families qualify for cash assistance through TANF. Currently the eligibility line is 30% of the Federal Poverty Level. This means that for a family of three, the household income must be under \$4,701. These families are in the most danger of being lost. Due to the cuts in 2003 we have already lost some of these families. We know they did not leave the TANF rolls to go to good jobs, we know that their phones have been disconnected, as phone service is often the first basic service to go. We know that they have been utilizing food banks and temporary shelters.~~

WEEL is asking this committee to consider our most vulnerable neighbors. As TANF rolls have decreased, the child poverty rate has increased. I think we can all agree that no child should be cold or hungry. No sick child should go without medical care. No child should live in fear of losing his or her home. These families are our neighbors. We all live in this community together and their well being directly affects our own. We have the resources to take care of our neighbors, to make sure they are on their feet and walking the long road out of poverty.

Breaking the cycle for themselves and their children. *respectfully* WEEL asks that the 23 million dollar TANF surplus be used toward a full reinstatement of cash benefits.

Thank you.