

Educating welfare mothers

August 30, 2012

[This is an expanded version of a letter sent to the *New York Times* and not printed.]

Writing in the *New York Times Magazine*, Paul Tough says that the key to eradicating poverty is education. ("What does Obama really believe in?", Aug. 15, 2012). Yet he does not mention that the welfare reform bill, enacted in 1996, prevented the parents of children who receive welfare from furthering their education. AFDC, which preceded TANF as a welfare program, allowed parents (most of whom were mothers) to obtain a degree in a 4-year college program while they received welfare. This enabled them to obtain jobs that would support a family. Many well-known and successful women were helped by a welfare grant to get an education. Obama's mother was one of those women.

Soon after the welfare reform bill was passed, there was a precipitous decline in college enrollment among welfare recipients. Studies show that most women who finished college did not return to welfare and obtained jobs that supported their family. One study of six states found that 87 percent of recipients who graduated from two-or four-year colleges were still off welfare six years later. A study by the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee found that as of 1998, only one out of six women forced off welfare had a job that lifted her out of poverty. Meanwhile, the average salary of someone with a one-year or two-year degree from Milwaukee Area Technical College ranged between \$20,000 and \$24,000. (Derrick Jackson, "Women on welfare need education - why deny them?" *The Boston Globe*, 4/15/98)