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Welfare rule could hurt most states

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Kevin McGuire estimates that 18,000 welfare recipients in Maryland have entered the work force during the past two years.

"If that's failing, I'm guilty," said McGuire, who oversees the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

But under proposed changes to the nation's welfare laws, McGuire and his employees will have a lot of work to do over the coming year, or Washington could withhold millions of dollars.

Congress is expected soon to approve legislation that requires states to place at least half of their welfare families in jobs or approved training programs.

Only 10 states meet that requirement, according to the latest statistics compiled by the federal government. Some states are not close: Maryland, 9.1 percent; Pennsylvania, 9.9 percent; and West Virginia, 14.2 percent.

Kansas leads with a work-participation rate of 87.9 percent. The other nine states meeting the threshold are Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Montana, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

The data come from the 2003 budget year, and some states, including Maryland, say their participation rates have improved since then.

The House is expected to consider the proposed changes on Feb. 1. The Senate has passed the legislation, largely along party lines.

The overhaul of the temporary-aid program for families was attached to a bill that would trim government spending by \$40 billion over five years.

LOCAL ANGLE

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