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Hatch proposes drug testing for welfare, unemployment recipients

June 16th, 2010 @ 1:08pm

(AP file photo)

SALT LAKE CITY -- Sen. Orrin Hatch wants recipients of welfare and unemployment benefits to undergo drug tests.

His idea is to amend a \$140 billion bill that extends tax breaks and social programs to include his idea. He says people who want to go on unemployment or welfare would have to pass a drug test before collecting.

"Look, we all know that drug abuse is a significant barrier," Hatch told KSL Newsradio Wednesday morning.

Hatch says it would help people get off drugs and be productive rather than waste government money.

He also contends that the idea is something you commonly see in the private sector.

"A lot of employers do it. Why shouldn't we, when people are taking federal dollars in the form of cash," Hatch said.

But may low-income advocates are not happy with Hatch's idea. They say it's unconstitutional to make people take a drug test in order to receive benefits.

Melissa Smith, with the Community Action Partnership of Utah, said it's discriminatory as well.

"You're saying, 'You have a disease -- which is an addiction to drugs -- and so now you cannot receive these benefits, and now your children cannot receive these benefits,'" Smith explained.

Smith said the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled it would be an unlawful search and seizure to require a drug test before receiving government money.

She said a study showed that 4.6 percent of welfare recipients are addicted to drugs, versus 4.9 percent of the general population.

Smith also said she thinks the cost of drug testing and treatment would be just too high.

Story compiled with contributions from [Andrew Adams](#) and [Mary Richards](#).

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Should recipients of welfare and unemployment benefits be required to undergo mandatory drug testing?

- Yes, prevent waste of federal dollars
- No, could harm innocent victims, children

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