Welfare

Welfare Reform – Latina Overrepresentation in the Welfare Rolls

Question: Is it true that Latinas are over represented on the welfare rolls, as the Washington Monthly article "Left Behind" asserts?

> **Answer**: Both blacks and Hispanics are overrepresented on the welfare rolls. While Hispanics were 23% of the welfare caseload in 1997, they were only 11% of the American population. However, the increase in the number of Hispanics in the welfare caseload over the last few years is proportional to the increase in the Hispanic population in America since 1992.

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Everybody's leaving the welfare rolls--except Latinas

MARIA IS A SLIGHT, DIFFIDENT woman who has floated on and off of welfare for the better part of a decade. A native of Guatemala, she has raised six children, survived an abusive marriage, and suffered from medical conditions ranging from hypertension to diabetes. For the past six months, she and her two elementary school-aged children have slept on the living room floor of her eldest daughter's one-bed-room apartment as Maria has conducted a disheartening job search. "There are two things I can do," Maria explains in Spanish as she fingers her wispy black hair. "Take care of kids or work as a house-cleaner" She has papered local motels with applications, but the only position she could find was a babysitting job on Saturday mornings. "It doesn't cover anything," she says quietly.

Over the past five years, the nation's welfare rolls have plunged by about 40 percent. But the decline mostly reflects an exodus of white women from public assistance. Minorities have lagged behind, and Latinas like Maria are leaving at the slowest pace of all. While Hispanics are 11 percent of the population, they now account for 22 percent of welfare recipients. That's nearly double the level of a decade ago. And in areas with a heavy concentration of Hispanics, the numbers are much higher: In New York City, for example, Latinas outnumber white welfare mothers almost twelve to one.

These women are subject to much more stringent regulations than they were just a few years ago. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 did away with the federal entitlement to assistance. Now states parcel out welfare checks with strict work requirements attached. There is a five year lifetime limit on cash assistance, and with few exceptions, recipients must work after two years on the dole. States were required to reduce their caseloads by 25 percent last year, and another 25 percent in 2000. In order to meet those goals, caseworkers have put enormous pressure on their clients to find jobs. There are loopholes in the legislation, however, that could allow some recipients to stay on the rolls beyond the time limits. States can exempt 20 percent of their caseload from the five year cap. In addition, the welfare bill's restrictions apply only to the funds states receive from the federal government; once the five years are up, welfare clients could continue to receive state money. In other words, the current restrictions allow for a residue of long-term public aid recipients.

Latinas will probably be disproportionately represented in this category. On virtually every predictor of gaining self-sufficiency, they are at the very bottom of the scale. According to a 1994 Census Bureau report, 64 percent of Hispanic welfare recipients did not finish high school, almost double the rate for white women on public assistance. In addition, nearly half of Latinas living in the United States are immigrants, and the vast majority speak poor English, disqualifying them from all but a handful of jobs. These women are also concentrated in inner cities, where employment is hard to come by. According to a report in The New York Times, competition is so fierce in some poor urban areas that supermarket managers can insist that even employees who bag groceries speak English.

Obviously, with their low levels of education and poor language skills, many Latinas would profit from employment training or literacy classes. But they are the women most likely to be shut out of existing programs. According to Community Voices Heard, a welfare advocacy group based in New York City, only 25 percent of Latinas on the dole have access to job placement and training services, compared with 40 percent of African American women. That's not just because most of those services aren't offered in Spanish. In many cases, Latinas can't even communicate with their caseworkers, who would refer them to programs.

Poor English proficiency isn't the only obstacle first generation Hispanics trip over in their effort to become self-sufficient. Hispanic culture is deeply conservative, and many Latinas cling to traditional views of motherhood. They are hesitant to leave their children, and voice doubts about their ability to measure up on the job. For now, many of these women have maintained their welfare eligibility by participating in state-sponsored workfare programs or providing constant proof they are job hunting. And as long as these women make a "good faith" effort to find work, most states probably will not cut them from public assistance.

That fact that Latinas are having trouble leaving the rolls isn't a good sign. Hispanics are the fastest growing minority in the United States, and they show indications of developing an underclass. Teenage Latinas have a high pregnancy rate and the highest high school drop-out rate of all major ethnic groups, which translates into a high likelihood of becoming welfare mothers themselves. Latinas earn the lowest salaries of all women workers. And as they labor in low skill jobs, or struggle to find employment, it seems increasingly unlikely they will pull their families into the economic mainstream. "Latinos already have the highest rate of poverty in the United States," says Ramona Hernandez of the University of Massachusetts at Boston. "I think that number is just going to keep going up."

Spanning Generations

Latinas on welfare are not a uniform group. They include teenagers and aging grandmothers; some are third generation Americans, others came to this country just a few years ago. "More recent immigrants have to deal with the language issue," says Minerva Delgado of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund. "Second and third generation Latinas have their own set of problems. They have low levels of education and literacy, and bigger families. Finding work is challenging for them, too."

Diana Perez, a third generation Mexican American living in Chicago, can testify to some of those challenges. Perez is among the 30 percent of Latinas on welfare who have less than a ninth grade education. As the single mother of six children, child care is expensive and difficult to find. And like many Latinas, she has a spotty work history; after 25 years on the dole, her resume only lists a brief stint on an assembly line.

Perez is not a woman of immodest ambitions. "I want to work in an office," she says. "A place that is clean." But after two years of job hunting, she hasn't even been able to find work in a factory or on a cleaning crew. "It makes you feel like putting your head in a bucket," she says of her unsuccessful job search. "You feel like you are nothing." But despite the frustrations she's grappling with, Perez possesses an enormous advantage over many first generation Latinas: She speaks English. Women who can only chat in Spanish have trouble landing jobs at McDonald's. "It's the biggest barrier for women trying to leave public assistance," says Ramona Hernandez.

It's not just Central Americans fresh off of the boat whose English proficiency is limited to a handful of phrases. Many first generation Hispanics never become bilingual. Walk through the streets of Adams Morgan, in Washington, D.C., where wizened men hawk green plantains and salsa music pulses at full volume, and the reason becomes readily apparent. In this Havana-like environment, women can buy their groceries and rent apartments without speaking a word of English. And Adams Morgan is by no means an abnormality--swaths of cities across the country resemble transplanted slices of Latin America. Many Latinos ensconce themselves in the small radius of these barrios. That doesn't do much for their English skills. And most of these neighborhoods are located in inner cities, where jobs are difficult to find. These residents are also sealed off from networks that could inform them about work opportunities in surrounding areas.

Many immigrants are undocumented, a status that can lead to some unusual welfare cases. Women who enter the United States illegally can't go on the dole. But their children born in the United States are eligible for benefits. There are roughly 100,000 "child-only" immigrant cases in the United States, according to a spokesman for the Department of Health and Human Services. Many more families are eligible for government largesse, but shy away from applying for aid because they fear being deported. Those who do receive a welfare check through their children end up playing by different rules than direct recipients. Most significantly, they are exempt from the five year time restriction. By the same token, they can't enroll in job training or English classes. Without work papers or access to social services, these women are doubly dependent on public assistance. Freed from short time restrictions, many will rely on government charity until their children are no longer eligible.

Take a 24-year-old Salvadoran woman we'll call Lourdes. Lourdes immigrated to the United States eight years ago, and all three of her U.S.-born children are on the rolls. She briefly scrubbed toilets in an office building and found her salary barely covered her babysitting bills. Now she shares a one-bedroom apartment with six other people, putting out feelers to find work as a maid. Even if she did have a green card, it's hard to see what other jobs she's qualified for--her-seven-year-old son has more formal education that she does. And because of her illegal status, she can't attend state-sponsored English classes or enroll in job training workshops. "They only way I could get papers is through a lawyer," she says almost inaudibly over the phone. "I can't pay for that."

Madres First

Scanty education, language barriers, and not-quite-above-board residency papers aren't the only stumbling blocks Latinas encounter as they attempt to move from welfare into work. Latin American culture is scarcely progressive, and many Hispanic women see their primary role as caretakers to their children. "The biggest issue in these women's lives is raising their children," says Tim Bell, coordinator of the adult education program at Erie Neighborhood House in Chicago. "They're being forced to take on an entirely new identity."

One of the thorniest issues all working parents have to confront is child care. For women raised to consider themselves madres first, spending time away from their kids can be particularly difficult. Latinas tend to have more children than white women, and they harbor a deep distrust of day care. A 1991 New York state study of female welfare recipients found that 75 percent of Hispanic mothers feared their children would be mistreated in day care, compared with 45 percent of non-Hispanic mothers. It's worth noting that most Latinas can only afford unlicensed day care, facilities that often run the gamut from terrible to mediocre. And in conversations with several women I got the impression they had all seen the same horror stories about deviant care givers on television. In any case, when they work, Hispanics generally have family members watch over their kids--an arrangement that may ease their consciences, but is far more unreliable.

Perhaps because so many Hispanic women primarily identify themselves as wives and mothers, they are less confident about what they can accomplish on the job. According to the New York study of public aid recipients, 45 percent of Hispanics on the dole feared they could not perform as well as others at work, compared with 26 percent of non-Hispanic women. That makes sense in the context of Latin culture. From a young age, women are barraged with the message that they must be deferential and self-sacrificing. Sociologist Evelyn Stevens dubbed the Hispanic image of the ideal woman marianismo--she postulates that the ultimate role model for Latinas is none other than the Virgin Mary herself. As psychologists Rosa Maria Gil and Carmen Inoa Vaszquez point out, the tenets of marianismo may make for accommodating housewives, but they don't mesh with the dictates of the workplace. "Can you imagine a list of attributes [like abnegation and submissiveness] in a resume, job description, or want ad?" they ask in The Maria Paradox.

Getting off of public assistance will require many Latinas to shake some of the most deeply held creeds of their culture. For that reason, public policy analysts say, it's important for social workers and teachers in job training programs to have a sense of the world Hispanics are coming from. But most social services not only flunk the "culturally sensitive test"--they are literally conducted in a different language. Fifty-seven percent of Spanish-speaking welfare recipients in Brooklyn and Queens cannot communicate with their case worker, according to Andrew Friedman of the welfare advocacy group Make the Road by Walking. Few states offer bilingual training programs. There are private and community-based organizations across the country that provide training in Spanish. But since the national zeitgeist became "work first" with the overhaul of the welfare system, many women have been barred from these programs, too.

Shunted

Until a year ago, there was no limit on the length of time welfare mothers could take classes at the Chicago Commons Employment Training Center, which serves a predominately Latina clientele. Because women encounter different obstacles as they prepare for work, it didn't make sense to impose an arbitrary "one-size-fits-all" deadline, explains program director Jenny Wittner. "A lot of these women need an enormous amount of help to have a shot at a decent job," she says. A whopping 82 percent of the women have been in abusive relationships. Some students can't decipher the help wanted ads or balance a checkbook. And Hispanics who are illiterate in both Spanish and English often need months of language classes before they can function in even low-paying jobs, says Wittner. In part because the program was open-ended, Chicago Commons has posted a solid success rate: Four years after leaving the program, 63 percent of the women are still working.

When the welfare reform bill was passed in 1996, however, caseworkers began pulling their clients out of the Commons. It wasn't the caseworkers' fault, Wittner hastens to add. The legislation's strict requirements for caseload reduction have placed enormous pressure on social workers to shove women into jobs or short-term training programs. While Wittner cut the Commons' program down to six months, 12 of her students were forced to drop out in January alone. Wittner says service providers across the country are running into the same problem. "States are only allowing for two to three weeks of training," she says. "That just doesn't encompass enough time for learning."

Cristina di Meo of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies says Latinas in New York City have seen their educational opportunities fall, too. Community based literacy classes in the City were once stuffed with welfare mothers trying to learn English, she says. That changed in 1997, when New York City instituted a "workfare" program which requires able bodied public aid recipients to work 35 hours a week in exchange for cash assistance. "Students have dropped out of English courses in droves in order to meet the workfare requirement," says di Meo. The only program open to Spanish-speakers now is a workfare arrangement providing English classes two days a week over six months. "It's inadequate," she says. "The students hardly learn any English at all."

Second generation Latinas seem to have more opportunities to get ahead in workfare programs. Bronx native Sandra Agront has been on the dole her entire life: Her mother raised seven children on public assistance, and Agront opened her own account when she had the first of her three kids at 18. Nine years later, the second-generation Puerto Rican is working and preparing to take the GED high-school equivalency test. In order to fulfill her workfare requirement, she watches over kids at a shelter. She enjoys spending time with children; her goal now is to become a teacher's assistant. Even if it were an option, she wouldn't want to go back to collecting a welfare check and spending long days watching soap operas. "I like what I'm doing," she says.

Agront is an example of what workfare can be under the best of circumstances. Enrolling in GED classes was the first step to realizing her aspiration of attending college, and her internship is at least linked to her career goals. But Agront's arrangement wasn't the product of considered state planning--instead, she seems to have chanced upon it. Her first workfare job was sweeping floors in a tenement. The job training program she attends in the Bronx generally requires students to enroll full-time; the directors have made exceptions for some workfare participants. She's also fortunate to have two family members who can watch her young kids. With her support network and some lucky placements, she has a good chance of becoming self-supporting over the long term.

That's not the case for many monolingual and poorly educated Hispanics. Without English and basic literacy classes, these women will have trouble finding even low-skill jobs. And if they are hired, not all of these positions will lead to long-term employment. Take Maria, the mother of six who is currently unemployed. The primary reason she's been on the dole four times is because most of her work experience consists of cleaning motel rooms: When tourist seasons draw to a close, a round of layoffs generally ensues, and she goes back on welfare. In addition, few "pink collar" jobs provide benefits. If workers or their children fall sick, many will go on public assistance to qualify for Medicaid. They will, of course, lose this safety net if states begin to strictly enforce time limits.

A Two-Way Street

That's why we should stop giving short shrift to training programs. Providing instruction need not rule out requiring women to work or perform community service. If programs were time-flexible and provided on-site child care, many women would find ways to juggle jobs and classes. And in order to steer women away from the revolving door of work to welfare, it makes sense to prepare them for skilled jobs that pay above the minimum wage and provide benefits.

"We've found that women who undergo vocational training have higher rates of job retention and more opportunities for advancement," says Wittner. "They have careers, not temporary jobs."

It's a challenge to persuade Latinas raised on a steady diet of marianismo to aspire to become electricians or welders. Aside from their own cultural biases, these women face pressure from boyfriends, husbands, and parents to keep out of traditionally macho professions. As one woman put it, "[y]ou can bust your knees scrubbing floors, and they think that's much better than being a foreman at a construction job earning $20 an hour." But single Latina mothers have to put food on the table, and they want to do meaningful work. When they realize how much heftier the paychecks are for fixing cars rather than flipping burgers, many will abandon the values in which they were raised and train for traditionally male crafts.

These women will also have to accept the fact they cannot be stay-at-home parents. Many Latinas already understand this. "I can count on one hand the women who have told me they don't want to work," says Andrew Friedman. "These women want jobs." If Hispanics feel more comfortable leaving their kids with family members, we should respect that choice. But caseworkers and employers should also insist these mothers have back up plans for the days aunts and grandmothers do not come through. And we should assure the child care available is safe and affordable.

If we met these women half way, and provided them with the training they need to become self-sufficient, the vast majority of Latinas would rise to the challenge. Like most welfare recipients, they want to make their own decisions and provide their children with decent upbringings. But we are not meeting these women half way. Quite the opposite; we are actually cutting them off from the few comprehensive training programs that are open to them. And with the rules rigged this way, most service providers are pessimistic about the prospects for indigent Hispanics. "These women are going to end up in low-paying, low skill jobs," warns Tim Bell, director of adult education at Erie House. "Their kids will grow up on the street. And believe me, we will pay a price for it."

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CLINTON-GORE ACCOMPLISHMENTS
REFORMING WELFARE

On August 22, 1996, President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, fulfilling his longtime commitment to 'end welfare as we know it.' As the President said upon signing, "... this legislation provides an historic opportunity to end welfare as we know it and transform our broken welfare system by promoting the fundamental values of work, responsibility, and family."

TRANSFORMING THE BROKEN WELFARE SYSTEM

- **Overhauling the Welfare System with the Personal Responsibility Act**: In 1996, the President signed a bipartisan welfare plan that is dramatically changing the nation's welfare system into one that requires work in exchange for time-limited assistance. The law contains strong work requirements, performance bonuses to reward states for moving welfare recipients into jobs and reducing illegitimacy, state maintenance of effort requirements, comprehensive child support enforcement, and supports for families moving from welfare to work -- including increased funding for child care. State strategies are making a real difference in the success of welfare reform, specifically in job placement, child care and transportation. In April 1999, the President unveiled landmark new welfare regulations that will promote work and help those who have left the rolls to succeed in the workforce and stay off welfare.

- **Law Builds on the Administration's Welfare Reform Strategy**: Even before the Personal Responsibility Act became law, many states were well on their way to changing their welfare programs to jobs programs. By granting federal waivers, the Clinton Administration allowed 43 states -- more than all previous Administrations combined -- to require work, time-limit assistance, make work pay, improve child support enforcement, or encourage parental responsibility. The vast majority of states have chosen to build on their welfare demonstration projects approved by the Administration.

- **Welfare Rolls Decline as More Recipients go to Work**: In April 1999, the President released state-by-state data (from December 1998) showing that welfare caseloads are at their lowest level in 30 years and that the welfare rolls have fallen by nearly half since he took office. Since January 1993, 29 states have had caseload declines of more than half and nationwide the rolls have fallen by 46%, from 14.1 million to 7.6 million. This historic decline occurred in response to the Administration's grants of federal waivers to 43 states, the provisions of the new welfare reform law, and the strong economy. Information released by the Department of Health and Human Services also shows that the percentage of welfare recipients working has tripled since 1992, that an estimated 1.5 million people who were on welfare in 1997 were working in 1998, and that all states met the first overall work participation rates required under the welfare reform law.

MOVING PEOPLE FROM WELFARE TO WORK

- **Mobilizing the Business Community**: At the President's urging, the Welfare-to-Work Partnership was launched in May 1997 to lead the national business effort to hire people from the welfare rolls. The Partnership began with 105 participating businesses, and in his 1999 State of the Union address, the President announced that the Partnership has grown to more than 10,000 businesses. Since 1997, these businesses have hired over 410,000 welfare recipients, surpassing the challenge the President set in May of 1998. The Partnership provides technical assistance and support to businesses around the country, including: its toll-free number 1-888-USA-JOB1, a web site, a quarterly newsletter, and a "Blueprint for Business" hiring manual. The Partnership also published "The Road to Retention," a report of companies that have found higher retention rates for former welfare recipients than for other new hires, and strategies they used to achieve this success.

- **Connecting Small Businesses with New Workers and Creating New Entrepreneurs**: The Small Business Administration is addressing the unique and vital role of small businesses who employ over one-half of the private workforce, by helping small businesses throughout the country connect with job training organizations and job-ready welfare recipients. In addition, SBA provides training and assistance to welfare recipients who wish to start their own businesses. SBA provides assistance to businesses through its 1-800-U-ASK-SBA number, as well through its network of small business development and women's business centers, one-stop capital shops, Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) chapters, district offices, and its website.

- **Mobilizing Civic, Religious and Non-profit Groups**: Vice President Gore created the Welfare-to-Work Coalition to Sustain Success, a coalition of national civic, service, and faith-based groups committed to helping former welfare recipients succeed in the workforce. Working in partnership with public agencies and employers, Coalition members provide mentoring, job training, child care, transportation, and other support to help these new workers with the transition to self sufficiency. Charter members of the Coalition include: Alpha Kappa Alpha, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the Baptist Joint Committee, Goodwill, Salvation Army, the United Way, Women's Missionary Union, the YMCA, the YWCA, and other civic and faith-based groups.

- **Doing Our Fair Share with the Federal Government's Hiring Initiative**: Under the Clinton/Gore Administration, the federal workforce is the smallest it has been in thirty years. Yet, this Administration also believes that the federal government, as the nation's largest employer, must lead by example. In March 1997, the President asked the Vice President to oversee the federal government's hiring initiative in which federal agencies committed to directly hire at least 10,000 welfare recipients in the next four years. In April 1999, the President announced that the federal government has hired 12,000 welfare recipients, meeting the goal nearly two years ahead of schedule. As a part of this effort, the White House pledged to hire six welfare recipients and has already exceeded this goal.

- **Funds to Help Move More People from Welfare to Work**: Because of the President's leadership, the 1997 Balanced Budget Act included $3 billion for Welfare-to-Work grants to help states and local communities move long-term welfare recipients, and certain non-custodial parents, into lasting, unsubsidized jobs. These funds can be used for job creation, job placement and job retention efforts, including wage subsidies to private employers and other critical post-employment support services. The Department of Labor provides oversight, but most of the dollars are placed through the Private Industry Councils, in the hands of the localities who are on the front lines of the welfare reform effort. In addition, 25% of the funds are awarded by the Department of Labor on a competitive basis to support innovative welfare-to-work projects. The President announced the first round of 49 competitive grants in May, and the Vice President announced the second round of 75 competitive grants in November 1998. In January 1999, the Department of Labor announced the availability of $240 million in competitive grants for FY 1999. These funds will support innovative local welfare-to-work strategies for noncustodial parents, individuals with limited English proficiency, disabilities, substance abuse problems, or a history of domestic violence.

The President's FY 2000 Budget requests $1 billion to extend the Welfare-to-Work program to help 200,000 long-term welfare recipients and noncustodial parents in high-poverty areas move into lasting unsubsidized employment. The initiative would provide at least $150 million to ensure that every state helps fathers fulfill their responsibilities by working, paying child support, and playing a responsible part in their children's lives. Under this proposal, states and communities would use a minimum of 20% of their formula funds to provide job placement and job retention assistance to low-income fathers who sign personal responsibility contracts committing them to work and pay child support. This effort would further increase child support collections, which have risen 80% since the President took office, from $8 billion in 1992 to $14.4 billion in 1998. Remaining funds will go toward assisting long-term welfare recipients with the greatest barriers to employment to move into lasting jobs. The reauthorized program also would double the Welfare-to-Work funding available for tribes.

- **Tax Credits for Employers**: The Welfare-to-Work Tax Credit, enacted in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act, provides a credit equal to 35% of the first $10,000 in wages in the first year of employment, and 50% of the first $10,000 in wages in the second year, to encourage the hiring and retention of long term welfare recipients. This credit complements the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which provides a credit of up to $2,400 for the first year of wages for eight groups of job seekers. The Omnibus Budget Act of 1998 included an extension through June 30, 1999 and the President's FY 2000 Budget proposes to extend both credits for an additional year.

- **Welfare-to-Work Housing Vouchers**: In 1999, the President proposed and Congress approved $283 million for 50,000 new housing vouchers for welfare recipients who need housing assistance to get or keep a job. Families will use these welfare-to-work housing vouchers to move closer to a new job, to reduce a long commute, or to secure more stable housing that will eliminate emergencies which keep them from getting to work every day on time. Nearly all of these vouchers will be awarded to communities on a competitive basis, to communities that create cooperative efforts among their housing, welfare and employment agencies. The President's FY 2000 Budget provides $430 million for 75,000 welfare-to-work housing vouchers, including $144 million in new funds for 25,000 additional vouchers.

- **Welfare-to-Work Transportation**: One of the biggest barriers facing people who move from welfare to work -- in cities and in rural areas -- is finding transportation to jobs, training programs and child care centers. Few welfare recipients own cars. Existing mass transit does not provide adequate links to many suburban jobs at all, or within a reasonable commute time. In addition, many jobs require evening or weekend hours that are poorly served by existing transit routes. To help those on welfare get to work, President Clinton proposed a $100 million a year welfare-to-work transportation plan as part of his ISTEA reauthorization bill. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) authorized $750 million over five years for the President's Job Access initiative and reverse commute grants. Of this amount, $50 million is guaranteed funding in FY 1999, rising to $150 million in 2003. The Omnibus Budget Act included $75 million for this program in FY 1999, and in May, Vice President Gore awarded $71 million of these funds to 179 communities in 42 states around the country. The President's Budget proposes to double funding for FY 2000, bringing the program to the authorized level of $150 million. The Job Access competitive grants will assist states and localities in developing flexible transportation alternatives, such as van services, for welfare recipients and other low income workers.

SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

- **Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit**: Expansions in the EITC included in the President's 1993 Economic Plan are making work pay for 15 million working families, including former welfare recipients. A study conducted by the Council of Economic Advisors reported that in 1997, the EITC lifted 4.3 million American out of poverty -- more than double the number in 1993. The findings also suggest that the increase in labor force participation among single mothers who received welfare is strongly linked to the EITC expansion.

- **Improving Access to Affordable and Quality Child Care:** Under the Clinton Administration, federal funding for child care has increased by 70%, helping parents pay for the care of about one million children. The 1996 welfare reform law increased child care funding by $4 billion over six years to provide child care assistance to families moving from welfare to work.

  The President's budget proposes to expand the Child Care and Development Block Grant to help working families struggling to meet the costs of child care. The President's proposal: (1) increases funding for child care subsidies by $7.5 billion over five years, and these new funds, combined with funds provided in welfare reform, will enable the program to serve an additional 1.15 million children by FY 2004; (2) provides $3 billion over five years to promote early learning; and (3) provides $173 million to improve child care quality. Additional funds for subsidies are necessary because currently, only 1.25 million of the approximately 10 million families eligible for assistance under federal law receive help.

  The President's proposal also includes $5 billion over five years to expand the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) to provide greater tax relief for nearly three million working families paying for child care and eliminate income tax liability for almost all families with incomes below 200% of poverty. Additionally, the proposal includes $1.3 billion to enable parents who have children under one year old to take advantage of the CDCTC by allowing these 1.7 million families to claim assumed child care expenses of $500. The President's plan also includes a new tax credit to businesses that offer child care services to their employees. The President has proposed spending $600 million in FY 2000 to triple funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program, which supports the creation and expansion of after-school and summer-school programs to help roughly 1.1 million children each year. Finally, the President's proposal includes a significant new investment in Head Start, our nation's premier early childhood development program, with an additional $607 million in FY 2000 to reach 42,000 more children, enabling the program to serve 877,000 low income children.

- **Providing Health Care to Low-Income Working Families.** In passing welfare reform, the President insisted on maintaining the Medicaid entitlement; indeed, he vetoed two welfare bills that did not guarantee continued Medicaid coverage to all adults and children who were then eligible. Beyond preserving Medicaid eligibility, the Clinton Administration has accomplished the following to ensure that low-income families have access to health care.

  - ***Creation of the Children's Health Insurance Program***. The President, with bipartisan support from the Congress, created the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 allocated $24 billion dollars over the next five years to extend health care coverage to uninsured children through State-designed programs. States project that they will ensure 2.5 million children when their new CHIP programs are fully implemented.
  - ***Allowing States to Expand Medicaid to Cover Families***. The welfare law allows states to expand Medicaid coverage under section 1931 to families who earn too much to be eligible for Medicaid but not enough to afford health insurance. These expansions allow states to present Medicaid as a freestanding health insurance program for low-income families -- an important step towards removing the stigma associated with the program and reaching families who do not have contact with the TANF system.
  - ***Providing Medicaid Coverage to Low-income Two-Parent Families Who Work***. In August 1998, the President eliminated a vestige of the old welfare system by allowing all states to provide Medicaid coverage to working, two-parent families who meet State income eligibility requirements. Under the old regulations, adults in two-parent families who worked more than 100 hours per month could not receive Medicaid regardless of their income level. Because the same restrictions did not apply to single-parent families, these regulations created disincentives to marriage and full-time work. Prior to eliminating the rule entirely, the Administration allowed a number of states to waive this rule. The new regulation eliminates this requirement for all States, providing health coverage for more than 130,000 working families to help them stay employed and off welfare.
  - ***Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA)***. TMA provides time-limited Medicaid coverage to low-income households whose earnings or child support would otherwise make them ineligible for welfare-related Medicaid under state income eligibility

standards. The President's FY 2000 Budget would reduce burdensome reporting requirements, including TMA eligibility procedures in the current Medicaid eligibility redetermination process. The budget also exempts those states that have expanded Medicaid coverage to families with incomes up to 185% of the federal poverty level from burdensome TMA reporting requirements, providing states with additional incentives to provide critical health care services.

- ***Helping States Help Low-Income Families***. In March 1999, the Administration released new guidance encouraging States to reach out to children and families who are no longer eligible for cash assistance but are still eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. It also establishes that states must provide Medicaid applications upon request and process them without delay. The guidance reiterates state responsibilities to establish and maintain Medicaid eligibility for families and children affected by welfare reform, and provides creative examples of the best way to liberalize eligibility.

- **Investing for the Future**: In 1992, the President proposed to establish Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) to empower low-income families to save for a first home, post-secondary education, or to start a new business. The 1996 welfare reform law authorized the use of welfare block grants to create IDAs. And last year, the President signed legislation creating a five-year demonstration program. Households that are either eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit and have a net worth below $10,000 are eligible to participate in the demonstration. The FY 1999 budget includes $10 million to launch this initiative, and the President has proposed to double the commitment to $20 million in FY 2000.

PROMOTING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- **Increasing Parental Responsibility and Enforcing Child Support**: Tougher measures under the Clinton Administration resulted in a record $14.4 billion in child support collections in 1998, an increase of $6.4 billion, or 80% since 1992. Not only are collections up, but the number of families that are actually receiving child support has also increased. In 1997, the number of child support cases with collections rose to 4.2 million, an increase of 48% from 2.8 million in 1992.

  - ***Improving the Collection System***. A new collection system, proposed by the President in 1994 and enacted as part of the 1996 welfare reform law, has located over 1.2 million delinquent parents in its first nine months of operation. With approximately one-third of all child support cases involving parents living in different states, this National Directory of New Hires helps track parents across state lines.
  - ***Tougher Penalties***. In June 1998, the President signed the Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act, a law based on his 1996 proposal for tougher penalties for parents who repeatedly fail to support children living in another state or who flee across state lines to avoid supporting them.
  - ***Increasing Paternity Establishements***. Paternity establishment, often the crucial first step in child support cases, has dramatically increased, due in large part to the in-hospital voluntary paternity establishment program begun in 1994 by the Clinton

Administration. In 1997, the number of paternities established or acknowledged rose to a record 1.3 million, two and a half times the 1992 figure of 512,000.

- ***Increasing Collections***. Finally, President Clinton has taken executive action, including: collections from federal payments such as income tax refunds and employee salaries, and steps to deny federal loans to delinquent parents. The federal government collected over $1.1 billion in delinquent child support from federal income tax refunds for tax year 1997, a 70% increase since 1992.

- **Breaking the Cycle of Dependency -- Preventing Teen Pregnancy**: Significant components of the President's comprehensive effort to reduce teen pregnancy became law when the President signed the 1996 Personal Responsibility Act. The law requires unmarried minor parents to stay in school and live at home or in a supervised setting; encourages "second chance homes" to provide teen parents with the skills and support they need; and, provides $50 million a year in new funding for state abstinence education activities. Since 1993, the Administration has supported innovative and promising teen pregnancy prevention strategies, including working with boys and young men on pregnancy prevention strategies. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, a private nonprofit organization, was formed in response to the President's 1995 State of the Union. In 1997, the President announced the National Strategy to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. The first annual report on this Strategy reported that HHS-supported programs already reach at least 31% or 1,470 communities in the United States. In April 1999, the Vice President announced new data showing that we continue to make real progress in encouraging more young people to delay parenthood -- teen births have declined nationwide by 16% from 1991 to 1997, and have fallen in every state and across ethnic and racial groups. In addition, teen pregnancy rates are at their lowest level in 20 years.

RESTORING FAIRNESS AND PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

The President made a commitment to fix several provisions in the welfare reform law that had nothing to do with moving people from welfare to work. In 1997, the President fought for and ultimately was successful in ensuring that the Balanced Budget Act protects the most vulnerable. In 1998, the President continued his proposals to reverse unfair cuts in benefits to legal immigrants. The Administration's FY 2000 budget would build on this progress by restoring important disability, health, and nutrition benefits to additional categories of legal immigrants, at a cost of $1.3 billion over five years.

- **Disability and Health**: The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and the Noncitizen Technical Amendment Act of 1998 invested $11.5 billion to restore disability and health benefits to 380,000 legal immigrants who were in this country before welfare reform became law (August 22, 1996). The President's FY 2000 Budget would restore eligibility for SSI and Medicaid to legal immigrants who enter the country after that date if they have been in the United States for five years and become disabled after entering the United States. This proposal would cost approximately $930 million and assist an estimated 54,000 legal immigrants by 2004, about half of whom would be elderly.

- **Nutritional Assistance**: The Agricultural Research Act of 1998 provided Food Stamps for 225,000 legal immigrant children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities who enter the United States by August 22, 1996. The President's FY 2000 Budget would extend this provision by allowing legal immigrants in the United States on August 22, 1996 who subsequently reach age 65 to be eligible for Food Stamps at cost of $60 million, restoring benefits to about 20,000 elderly legal immigrants by 2004.

- **Health Care for Children and Pregnant Women**: Under current law, states have the option to provide health coverage to immigrant children and pregnant women who entered the country before August 22, 1996. The President's FY 2000 Budget gives states the option to extend Medicaid or CHIP coverage to low-income legal immigrant children and Medicaid to pregnant women who entered the country after August 22, 1996. The proposal would cost $325 million and provide critical health insurance to approximately 55,000 children and 23,000 women by FY 2004. This proposal would reduce the number of high-risk pregnancies, ensure healthier children, and lower the cost of emergency Medicaid deliveries.

- **Helping People Who Want to Work but Can't Find a Job**: The Balanced Budget Act, as amended by the Agricultural Research Act, also restored $1.3 billion in food stamp cuts. The welfare reform law restricts food stamps to 3 out of every 36 months for able-bodied childless adults, unless they were working. Acknowledging that finding a job often takes time, the BBA provided funds for work slots and food stamp benefits to help those who are willing to work but, through no fault of their own, have not yet found employment. In addition, the BBA allows states to exempt up to 15% of the food stamp recipients (70,000 individuals monthly) who would otherwise be denied benefits as a result of the "3 in 36" limit.

Talking It Over

By Hillary Rodham Clinton

Foster children over 18 need our support, too

I met the most extraordinary young woman last week. Joy Warren had just begun her first week at Yale Law School. But what's remarkable is that Joy grew up in foster care, and like more than 20,000 foster-care children each year, she "aged out" of the system when she turned 18.

This means Joy has been entirely on her own, without the traditional support system so many families provide, for the past seven years — years in which she managed to receive a college degree, work as an advocate to improve foster care and begin law school.

Children who grow up in foster care face many of the same challenges as other children and have many of the same needs. But they also have special challenges that demand special attention — and too often they just don't get it.

One 13-year-old foster child told me what she wants most: "I want a place that I can call home; a room that I can call my room; a family that I can love and would love me back." Is this too much to ask?

Although my own mother was never in formal foster care, her teen parents were unable to care for her when she was born. They sent her to live with her grandparents, but when that didn't work out, she went to live in the home of a family where she helped take care of the children for room and board.

My mother has often told me how grateful she is to the woman with whom she lived because she got to see what a real family was like. She watched what happens inside a home where parents and children go through all they should go through as a family. And she wanted to pass that opportunity on.

When I was growing up, she invited young women from a group home to come and work for us, spending time with our family, much as my mother had done so many years before.

I'm proud that this administration has cared enough to improve and reform our nation's foster-care system, including passing the Family and Medical Leave Act, which gives time off for parents to adopt a child. Tax credits are now available for families who adopt, and foster care and adoption have been freed from discrimination and delays based on race, culture and ethnicity.

I was especially proud when, last year, the president signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, a historic step toward improving the lives of children in foster care. The aim of this bill is to place this country's 500,000 foster-care children in safe, stable, loving and permanent homes. And it will help us meet our national goal of doubling the nation's annual adoption rate.

But, as important as this bill is, it doesn't address all the needs of the children who "age out" of the system each year and who, like Joy Warren, have to make the tough transition to living on their own.

Last year, at a roundtable in Berkeley, Calif., I spent an afternoon listening to young people describe the challenges of leaving the foster-care system. A disproportionate number are homeless and have trouble finishing school, finding jobs and receiving adequate health care. And, often, they don't get the life skills they need to survive in today's world.

There are many programs that work, several of which exist as a result of the advocacy and leadership of former foster kids like Joy. One national conference, Destination Future, where I met Joy last week, brings together older foster children and homeless young people to teach them life skills and advocacy techniques. Programs in Texas and Florida provide college-tuition assistance for young people in foster care. In Los Angeles County, set-aside entry-level jobs are available for young people aging out of foster care. Massachusetts has a teen parent transitional living program. And the California Youth Connection has become a national model of how to bring young foster teens together to form a network of support and advocacy.

One of the most critical challenges remaining is to make sure that children who age out of foster care gain access to health care. It is outrageous that these young people should find themselves among the uninsured. Some states are addressing this issue, but there is still far to go.

We must also strengthen the Federal Independent Living Program, which provides 85,000 young people critical assistance in their transition to independent living, helps them earn their high school diplomas and offers access to vocational training.

Federal legislation and state programs have put us on the right track. But we must do better. Now is the time to make sure that the 20,000 young people who each year become too old to remain in foster care receive the help they need to become independent and productive members of society.

• *To find out more about Hillary Rodham Clinton and read her past columns, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.*

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Domestic Violence

Question: How much does the Administration's national domestic violence hotline cost?

Answer: It costs $1.2 million a year. In 1995, its first year, it cost $1 million, much of which was for start up costs. In 1996, it cost $400,000 and in each year since it has cost $1.2 million. As of February of 1999, the hotline had received more than 292,000 calls since its launch, and the majority of these calls are from individuals who have never before reached out for assistance.