

## Social Services

The poverty rate in New York remains at 15 percent, ninth highest in the nation. The percentage of people still living in poverty is more than 50 percent higher than in neighboring states (New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont and Pennsylvania), and is 19 percent above the national average. According to statistics from the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), the number of public assistance recipients in New York City has declined by 64.1 percent since January 1995, while the homeless population as reported by the New York City Department of Homeless Services has actually increased by an alarming 55.8 percent.

The Governor has consistently rejected programs that would ensure that those leaving the rolls are in a position to rise above the poverty threshold and attain self-sufficiency. Once again, his SFY 2006-07 proposed budget fails to include programs designed to help New York's most vulnerable population

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become independent. As a result, New York does not provide the needed programs to ensure a poverty rate reduction that more closely corresponds with the reduction in the welfare rolls. Instead of reforming public assistance through greater job opportunities, the Governor has proposed and imposed more red tape and sanctions on those looking to work their way off public assistance. Instead, he has proposed measures to cut the basic grant and reduce the portion of income that is disregarded in the calculation of public assistance benefits to aid the working poor.

The Governor has also repeatedly proposed legislation to impose an additional sanction on public assistance families in which the head of household is in non-compliance. The sanction takes away the portion of the grant allocated to the children, essentially punishing them for their parents' actions. Many of the families in long term sanctioned status have significant barriers to employment, and could be better engaged through more intensive case services. These short-sighted proposals have been rejected by the Legislature on every occasion. Once again, the Governor proposes legislation in SFY 2006-07 that is designed to simply punish the poor, including full family sanction and a cut in benefit grant levels.

Nearly a decade after welfare reform, public assistance caseloads have declined dramatically. Yet, low-income New Yorkers still face significant economic instability. The make-up of welfare caseloads has changed, leaving an increasing proportion of those still

receiving assistance with significant barriers to employment and self-sufficiency.

In order to move this difficult to serve population toward long term self-sufficiency, it is critical that they are appropriat

*“In order to serve the needs of those remaining on public assistance, it is essential that adequate TANF funds are used to support programs that prepare recipients for employment.”*

ely engaged in education and training programs that meet their needs by putting them on the right path. It is essential that adequate amounts of TANF funds are allocated to support these vital programs that prepare recipients for employment.