

## Welfare a Hot Potato

Imagine yourself in an auditorium or stadium with 1,000 people from your community. Included are women, men and children of all ages. If you live in Adams County, one adult in that throng is receiving cash assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. If you live in Delaware, Clearfield or York counties, four adults are receiving TANF. If you live in Philadelphia, where enrollment is highest, 22 adults are on TANF.

Based on the small numbers involved, one might conclude that TANF cash assistance is not a big deal. But based on recent events in Congress and the opening salvos of the gubernatorial election, how wrong that would be!

The subject of welfare packs a huge political punch, even when relatively few people are involved. It was one of the headline issues of the '90s, when President Clinton promised "to end welfare as we know it" and many members of Congress won their seats on a platform that included welfare reform. The welfare legislation that became law in 1996 seemed to cool the debate for a while. States were given a fixed block grant of federal money and told to fashion their own welfare rules. As the economy boomed and states implemented their plans, welfare rolls fell by two-thirds.

But in 2002, when the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 came up for renewal, President Bush proposed to add new requirements for TANF parents and added costs for the states. That began four years of debate, which concluded February 1<sup>st</sup> when Congress passed the Deficit Reduction Act (S. 1932).

Under the new law, by October states must have 50 percent of adults on TANF working the required number of hours (30 hours a week or 20 hours if they have a child under 6 years of age). Public Welfare Secretary Estelle Richman testified about the impact of the new law on March 2<sup>nd</sup> when she appeared before the House Appropriations Committee. According to Richman, 34,000 parents must be meeting the new work requirements by October; currently only about 10,000 are. Richman told legislators that she is taking personal responsibility for making sure PA meets the requirements.

Meanwhile, supporters of Lynn Swann, Republican candidate for Governor, have suggested that the Rendell Administration is overly generous with welfare benefits, thus contributing to the problem PA faces in meeting the new requirements. Thus, it is entirely possible that a program involving only six adults out of every 1,000 people statewide will become an election issue.

As shown in the table, the number of adults receiving TANF cash assistance has grown by 16,063 (27 percent) over the four years from March 2002 to March 2006. Only Cambria and Sullivan counties have seen a decrease. All others have larger caseloads than four years ago with the largest percentage increases in Cumberland, Pike, York, Northampton, Fulton, Juniata, Schuylkill, Centre and Columbia counties. Is this a bad development? Much more information would be needed before that question could be answered. Whether the candidates for governor take the time to get that information, or whether they instead prefer to elicit old stereotypes, remains to be seen.

Adults on TAMI Caseload			
	TAMI Adults	Change	Percent of
	March 2006	2002-06	Population
<b>State Total</b>	74,899	<b>16,063</b>	0.6%
Adams	136	<b>17</b>	0.1%
Allegheny	9,407	<b>2,391</b>	0.6%
Armstrong	271	<b>83</b>	0.4%
Beaver	629	<b>167</b>	0.5%
Bedford	91	<b>26</b>	0.2%
Berks	2,147	<b>646</b>	0.5%
Blair	696	<b>185</b>	0.5%
Bradford	268	<b>72</b>	0.4%
Bucks	852	<b>172</b>	0.1%
Butler	363	<b>105</b>	0.2%
Cambria	639	<b>(6)</b>	0.4%
Cameron	23	<b>6</b>	0.4%
Carbon	131	<b>24</b>	0.2%
Centre	236	<b>117</b>	0.2%
Chester	696	<b>130</b>	0.1%
Clarion	148	<b>31</b>	0.4%
Clearfield	404	<b>57</b>	0.6%
Clinton	143	<b>40</b>	0.4%
Columbia	235	<b>116</b>	0.4%
Crawford	677	<b>79</b>	0.6%
Cumberland	264	<b>159</b>	0.1%
Dauphin	1,517	<b>622</b>	0.6%
Delaware	2,105	<b>910</b>	0.4%
Elk	130	<b>22</b>	0.4%
Erie	2,196	<b>292</b>	0.6%
Fayette	1,083	<b>159</b>	0.7%
Forest	14	<b>5</b>	0.2%
Franklin	313	<b>53</b>	0.2%
Fulton	42	<b>22</b>	0.3%
Greene	353	<b>136</b>	0.9%
Huntington	111	<b>14</b>	0.2%
Indiana	222	<b>33</b>	0.3%
Jefferson	146	<b>19</b>	0.3%
Juniata	55	<b>28</b>	0.2%
Lackawanna	953	<b>271</b>	0.5%
Lancaster	2,058	<b>997</b>	0.4%
Lawrence	641	<b>118</b>	0.7%
Lebanon	336	<b>124</b>	0.3%
Lehigh	1,485	<b>486</b>	0.4%
Luzerne	1,170	<b>441</b>	0.4%
Lycoming	698	<b>252</b>	0.5%
McKean	360	<b>193</b>	0.6%
Mercer	745	<b>210</b>	0.6%
Mifflin	187	<b>73</b>	0.4%
Monroe	329	<b>72</b>	0.2%
Montgomery	1,184	<b>493</b>	0.2%
Montour	45	<b>21</b>	0.2%
Northampton	919	<b>599</b>	0.3%
Northumberland	232	<b>92</b>	0.3%
Perry	126	<b>57</b>	0.3%
Philadelphia	31,795	<b>3,599</b>	2.2%
Pike	104	<b>61</b>	0.2%
Potter	94	<b>27</b>	0.5%
Schuylkill	488	<b>246</b>	0.3%
Snyder	69	<b>12</b>	0.2%
Summerset	242	<b>51</b>	0.3%
Sullivan	10	<b>(13)</b>	0.2%
Susquehanna	155	<b>26</b>	0.4%
Tioga	127	<b>15</b>	0.3%
Union	67	<b>3</b>	0.2%
Venango	404	<b>131</b>	0.7%
Warren	132	<b>46</b>	0.3%
Washington	480	<b>139</b>	0.2%
Wayne	161	<b>22</b>	0.3%
Westmoreland	974	<b>296</b>	0.3%
Wyoming	83	<b>6</b>	0.3%
York	1,510	<b>844</b>	0.4%