

# NEW YORK PUBLIC WELFARE ASSOCIATION, INC.

## *Renewing the Commitment to Welfare Reform*

March 1, 2010

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### *The NYPWA promotes public policies that:*

- Uphold the principles of welfare reform and promote personal responsibility
- Strengthen supports for working families
- Encourage the achievement of full potential
- Enable us to meet the basic needs of vulnerable populations
- Support emergency assistance to help with housing, utilities, and other urgent needs
- Modernize technology to facilitate access and improve the delivery of services

### *Welfare Reform Is a Success – Stay on Course*

Employment supports are now the foundation of public assistance. The vast majority of dollars go to programs that help people who are working or who are engaged in activities that are directed toward employment goals. The entire country has experienced dramatic increases in enrollment in Food Stamps and Medicaid, as well as in child support enforcement. Work supports also take many other forms – child care, transportation, energy assistance, job coaching, the Earned Income Tax Credit, mental health interventions, substance abuse services, domestic violence counseling, child welfare services. All of these supports can be used to provide greater family stability and to keep people employed. Steady employment is integral to enabling people to move beyond a reliance on cash assistance.

We need to continue to promote the full potential of New Yorkers while meeting basic needs. For most people, the goal is employment. However, in some cases, disabilities create barriers to work that are severe to the extent that the appropriate goal, for those who cannot get well, is to obtain financial stability through a determination of disability eligibility. In addition, there are vulnerable adults, such as individuals receiving Adult

Protective Services, who will not qualify for disability benefits, but who have severe challenges that make it difficult for them to retain steady employment. They will need cash assistance and other supports. New York State has a constitutional responsibility to provide for “the aid, care and support of the needy.” This role can and should be carried out in a manner that is fiscally responsible and supports desired outcomes, such as employment and self-support. For persons not eligible for federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), support is provided through the New York State Safety Net Assistance Program.

### *Background on the Passage of Federal and State Welfare Reform Laws in 1996-1997*

On August 22, 1996, President Clinton signed “The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,” more commonly known as the “Welfare Reform Law.” This stroke of the pen put an “end to welfare as we know it” and sparked the beginning of a new goal to make welfare “a second chance, not a way of life.” The entitlement program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was repealed, and state block grants for TANF were implemented on July 1, 1997. Much of the groundwork for reform was already set in place on a local level, but new federal and state laws paved the way to step-up the pace of change. New York passed its own version of welfare reform in August 1997. State legislation brought us into compliance with the new Federal law and implemented many additional changes. Unlike most states, New York chose to maintain a safety net program for persons in need who would no longer be eligible for federal benefits. The federal government reauthorized TANF in February 2006 under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 at the same level of funding. TANF Reauthorization is up for renewal on October 1, 2010.

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## ***Welfare Reform 1997-2009***

Welfare Reform took off during a period of economic prosperity. The availability of funds under the TANF Block Grant enabled counties to invest in more effective strategies to engage families in the workforce. Local districts were able to take advantage of these extraordinary opportunities to reduce welfare dependency, resulting in historic caseload reductions of over sixty percent. At the same time, increases in child support collections and the availability of the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credit helped to improve economic conditions for many families.

Since TANF is a block grant, New York State has been able to use the savings from caseload reductions to provide additional services. The most dramatic change has been the shift from cash assistance to a work support system that recognizes that people still need help in order to move toward greater independence. Benefits, such as food stamps and Medicaid, provided temporary support for people moving from welfare to work. Other services, such as child care subsidies and transportation, address barriers that had made employment difficult to maintain in the past. As a result, far fewer people are now dependent on cash assistance.

## ***Welfare Reform Today and in the Future***

Our goal is to promote full potential and make sure that basic needs are met. Welfare reform has enabled a large number of families to end long-term dependency on cash assistance. For many families, success includes a combination of employment and temporary services. These services will require continued funding in order to maintain employment goals and manage caseload growth. The NYPWA recommends an approach that ensures that TANF funds are strategically directed to efforts that will enable families who are eligible for cash assistance to achieve employment and self-support.

The challenge in future policymaking will be to cover the cost of the growing caseload while continuing to stay on course with welfare reform in order to help families achieve steady employment and support their children. As we move ahead, the faltering economy has provided new challenges, and the role of social services continues to evolve to address economic hardships and provide assistance to people in our communities.

## ***Turn to the NYPWA as a Policy Resource***

The New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) represents New York's 58 local social services districts. Our members deliver these services and are dedicated to improving the quality and effectiveness of social welfare policy, so that it is accountable to taxpayers and protective of vulnerable people.

All state policies need to reflect the fact that social services in New York State are administered by departments of local government. Local social services administrators provide the knowledge and experience necessary to guide our State in moving forward with public policy changes. Founded in 1869, the NYPWA was the first public welfare association in the country.

## ***The NYPWA offers the following policy resources:***

- A forward thinking vision about the future of social policy, including temporary assistance, child welfare, Medicaid, and related social services
- The historical perspective that is essential in understanding welfare reform
- Experience-based knowledge on what does work and what doesn't work
- The ability to balance a compassion for the hardships caused by poverty with a strong commitment to improving the lives of New Yorkers while achieving fiscal responsibility and program accountability
- Management expertise in running efficient organizations, solving problems, and exploring innovative approaches and new opportunities
- In-depth understanding of individual communities across the state and the skills in interpreting state policies and their relationship to local needs and resources

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