

**Testimony of the Hunger Action Network of New York State
To the Assembly Standing Committee on Social Services
On the Adequacy of the Public Assistance Grant
Friday, September 7, White Plains**

My name is Mark Dunlea and I am Associate Director of the Hunger Action Network of NYS.

The Hunger Action Network of New York State is a statewide membership organization of direct food providers, advocates and other individuals, whose goal is to end hunger and its root causes, including poverty, in NYS. Emergency food programs in our state provide food to more than two million New Yorkers annually.

We would like to express our appreciation to the Assembly for holding this hearing to highlight this important issue. We are also very appreciative of the Assembly's leadership this session in its effort to raise the Public Assistance grant level.

Hunger Action Network helps coordinates the Empire State Economic Security Campaign (ES2), which represents several hundred community, faith and labor organizations. ES2 focuses on universal health care; income security; education and workforce development; housing; and job creation.

ES2's recommendations on raising the welfare grant are:

- New York should immediately increase the Basic Allowance of the Public Assistance grant by 49% from \$291 to \$435 for a family of three to reflect the increase in the cost of living since the last adjustment in 1990.
- Fuel for Heating, Home Energy Allowance and the Supplemental Home Energy Allowances should be increased to account for inflationary increases since the last adjustments in 1986/1987.
- A commission should be established to investigate the adequacy of all public assistance allowances and to recommend mechanisms to provide for annual cost adjustments. At a minimum, welfare benefits should at least raise families to the poverty line.

Two years ago the shocking pictures of low-income residents, many of them African-American, trying to survive Katrina's flooding reminded us that poverty is still a major problem in our country. The recent census data documents that poverty remains a significant problem in our state. The low level of welfare benefits is certainly a major contributor to the high poverty rate, especially for children, as they fail to lift households above even 50% of the federal poverty rate.

New York continues to have the highest poverty rate of all of the northeastern and midwestern states. According to the Census Bureau data for 2005-06, New York's poverty rate was 14.3 percent—twelfth among the 50 states and well above the national average, which remained relatively flat at 12.5 percent. The American Community Survey (ACS) data recently released by the Census Bureau shows that the poverty rates in New York's major upstate cities are extraordinarily high. The four upstate cities covered by the ACS all had child poverty rates in the 40 percent range: Syracuse 40.2 percent, Rochester 40.9 percent, Albany 41.6 percent and Buffalo 42.6 percent.

It is likely not a coincidence that the last time New York's poverty rate did not exceed the U.S. rate was in 1990, when the welfare grant in New York State was last increased. The poverty rates were statistically even in that year.

Poverty in upstate cities remains at epidemic levels. Syracuse rate was 31.3%, Rochester 30.0%, Buffalo 26.9% and Albany 26.5%. The state's low welfare payment is one reason why 10% of the residents of Buffalo, Albany, Syracuse and Rochester now "officially" live in extreme poverty – defined as below 50% of the poverty level. And more than 10% of the residents of these cities and Albany are classified as extremely poor – with incomes less than half the poverty threshold.

It is also important to remember that since the last grant increase in 1990, there has been a major transformation of the state's welfare system. Those now on welfare can be described as the working poor, the disabled and children. Those who are able-bodied on welfare are required to participate in various work-related activities. Thus, individuals receiving public assistance are working at mostly low-wage or unpaid job assignments. They are playing by the rules and raising their child/ren mostly as single mothers. Those not working are elderly or disabled and cases where only the child is receiving assistance. They are all struggling trying to live on an average of \$9.50 (for a family of 3) – that's \$3 a day per person to pay for travel, clothing, school supplies, toilet paper, etc.

New York's low welfare payments contribute to hunger and homelessness. Malnourishment in children raises health care costs and impedes learning. It also forces them to live in unsafe conditions. (e.g., apartments with lead in the paint).

Welfare benefits have declined in value to only half of the federal poverty level. An entire generation of children has grown up since the last increase in the basic grant was approved 18 years ago. The shelter allowance has also remained basically the same, other than a small increase that was implemented two years ago as part of the ongoing legal challenge. Five times the state's courts – including the Court of Appeals – have ruled that the shelter allowance is illegally low, but it has remained in place as the state appeals over and over again.

We recently submitted a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) to get information on the extent to which households on public assistance are required to utilize their basic grant to subsidize their shelter allowance. (A copy is attached) While we found the information provided by the state confusing, it appears that the vast majority of welfare participants, particularly outside of NYC, have to use much of their basic grant to subsidize their rent.

Comparing the HUD Fair Market Value for rent throughout New York State to OTDA's Shelter Allowance Schedule, there was an average \$317 disparity between the allowance and the fair market rent. This gap is more than the maximum cash grant for a family of three. (A table is attached at the end).

The use of the basic grant to supplement the shelter allowance also creates problems with respect to food stamps. It is expected that one-third of a household's income, outside of deductions for various costs such as rent, will be used to supplement food stamps. Unfortunately, since many public assistance households have to use a portion of their basic grant to pay housing costs, this leaves less money for food than expected. Many low-income New Yorkers also spend more on rent than what food stamps artificially allow as a deduction for housing costs, so their food stamps are further lowered. Thus many food stamp recipients on public assistance run out of food by the third week of the month.

Since 1996, there has been a major transformation of the state's welfare system. The state welfare system is now supposed to be more focused on helping individuals move into jobs that can support their families. Those on welfare are required to participate in various work-related activities. Those still on welfare today are engaged in work activities, disabled or otherwise prevented from working, and children. Thus there are little public policy arguments in favor of making welfare benefits so low that the recipients are forced to live in abject poverty.

The changes to the federal welfare program actually provided the state with a funding source to help raise benefits. Yet billions of federal welfare dollars have been diverted to resolve the annual state budget games rather than being used to raise welfare participants out of poverty.

Cash assistance should provide at least enough for these families to survive in New York in the 21st century but current benefit levels are far below any common sense notion of subsistence. In 1975 public assistance for a three-person family was equal to 110% of the Federal Poverty Level. Today it has fallen to less than 50% of the poverty level. Within the past two years, there has been a modest, inadequate, increase in the shelter portion of the public assistance grant, but the basic allowance for all other expenses has been unchanged for 16 years. To keep pace with the rising cost of living, the \$291 a family of three received in the non-shelter portion of its public assistance grant in 1990 would today have to be increased by 55% to \$450.

The rate of inflation from 1990 to 2006 is 55% -- and the cost of many items has risen above that. The cost of milk rose 94%, green peppers by 190%, toothpaste by 68% and laundry detergent by 71%. It is no wonder that the lines at emergency food programs have continued to get longer.

In addition, the price of fuel oil and natural gas prices have on average more than doubled since the fuel for heating allowance was adjusted in 1987. Since that time average prices for electricity have increased by 84%, the cost of natural gas has increased 160% and the cost of fuel oil has increased 239%. For example, public assistance families in Albany using fuel oil to heat their homes are given only \$828 per year to pay for home heating costs. Families heating with natural gas are given only about \$700.

In addition, many families must use a portion of their basic allowance to pay the rent, because the shelter allowance in the public assistance grant is rarely sufficient to meet the housing cost. For example, in Monroe County a family of three with children heating with gas has a shelter allowance of \$397 per month, while the HUD Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$687. In New York City, a family of three with children has a shelter allowance of \$400 per month, while the HUD fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1075. In New York City it is estimated that by 2007, 86% of families living in private housing will have a rent level that is higher than the amount provided for rent in their welfare grant.

Raising the welfare grant would not only help poor New Yorkers but would put more money back into the local economy. Most of the welfare grant goes directly to landlords and energy companies.

It is also important to remember that since the last grant increase in 1990, there has been a major transformation of the state's welfare system. Those now on welfare can be described as the working poor, the disabled and children. Those on welfare are required to participate in various work-related activities.

Despite the 61% decline in the public assistance rolls since 1998, more than 535,000 New Yorkers including more than 300,000 children, still require public assistance to meet their most basic needs. (One alarming statistic compiled by the Schuyler Center for Advocacy and Analysis (SCAA) is that the share of poor children on public assistance has dropped from 69% of eligible children in 1993 to 36% in 2005, meaning that almost two thirds of all poor children are not receiving public assistance.)

A large portion of the people remaining on public assistance cannot be expected to increase their income through earnings. In New York City, 45% of the caseload are child only cases, are disabled by HIV/AIDS, have a head of household over 60, have a head of household on SSI or SSI pending or they have significant disabilities. While comparable data is not available for districts outside of New York City, according to OTDA data from 10/02-9/03, a statewide average of 23,400 individuals were exempted from work activities each month as a result of a disability.

We also wanted to respond to some of the other questions posed in your hearing notice.

What is the discrepancy between the basic cost of living for an average family of 3 receiving public assistance and the amount provided in the basic grant?

Enormous.

Welfare benefits in New York State have fallen to less than half of the federal poverty level. While every economist agrees that the poverty level no longer adequately reflects what income people need to obtain basic necessities such as food, housing, clothing, energy, transportation, etc. for their families, we continue to use the old definition of poverty because there is no agreement on how to fix it.

The only thing that the federal poverty level directly measures is food. A “poverty” food budget is determined and then multiplied by three. Most economists believe that food now represents about 1/6 of a household’s budget. So “real” poverty is closer to 200% of official poverty. That means that New York provides about 25% of what families need to survive upon. Of course that is offset by income or resources provided by public benefit programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, Family Health Plus but still it is clear that our state level of welfare benefits fall far short of meeting the constitutional responsibility to care for the needy.

In 2000, Hunger Action Network participated with many other groups (e.g., SENSES, Fiscal Policy Institute, SCAA) in documenting a self-sufficiency standard based on family sizes and actual costs in counties throughout New York State. A copy of this study can be downloaded at <http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/selfsufficiency.htm>

The Standard uses the best available estimates of the specific costs of providing food, housing, child care, transportation and health care. For costs such as housing, health care and child care, for which there is significant geographical variation, county-specific cost estimates are used. Outside New York City, for a single parent family with two preschool children, monthly self-sufficiency wage requirements range from \$5,044 per month in Nassau and Suffolk Counties to \$2,501 per month in Otsego County. If we assume full-time work, these translate into hourly wage requirements of \$28.66 and \$14.21 respectively.

For all jurisdictions in New York State, the self-sufficiency standard documents that families require incomes significantly higher than the federal poverty thresholds to meet basic needs. The federal poverty threshold for a family of three anywhere in the state (anywhere in the country for that matter) in 2000 was \$14,150. In Albany County, the annual income requirements for three-person single parent families calculated using the self-sufficiency standard range from \$21,900 for a parent with two older children to \$34,848 for a parent with two children using child care.

While both the Self-Sufficiency Standard and the official poverty measure assess income adequacy, the Standard differs from the official poverty measure in several important ways:

- the Standard explicitly incorporates the costs of working: transportation and child care;
- the Standard takes into account that many costs differ not only by family size and composition, but also by the age of the children;
- the Standard incorporates regional and local variations in costs; the Standard includes the net effect of taxes and tax credits;
- the Standard is based on the costs of each basic need considered separately.

The Economic Policy Institute provides a budget calculator where you can type in family size and location and get an estimate of what it costs to live there. (http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/datazone_fambud_budget). Unfortunately, it does not provide a calculator for Westchester County, so we have included data from Newburgh and Long Island.

Newburgh (N.Y. portion), NY

1 Parent/2 Children

Monthly housing	\$954
Monthly food	\$405
Monthly child care	\$1,195
Monthly transportation	\$239
Monthly health care	\$388
Monthly other necessities	\$367
Monthly taxes	\$464
Monthly total	\$4,012
Annual total	\$48,144
Percentage of all people in state living below family budget line*	35.3%
Number of all people in state living below family budget line*	1,106,000

Nassau-Suffolk, NY

1 Parent/2 Children

Monthly housing	\$1,225
Monthly food	\$405
Monthly child care	\$1,195
Monthly transportation	\$255
Monthly health care	\$388
Monthly other necessities	\$440
Monthly taxes	\$663
Monthly total	\$4,571
Annual total	\$54,852
Percentage of all people in state living below family budget line*	35.3%
Number of all people in state living below family budget line*	1,106,000

What are ways that New York State Could Improve the Income Status of Public Assistance Recipients – Food and Wage Supplements

One suggestion is to provide additional income to welfare participants in the form of a food allowance in such a way that the additional income is not counted for food stamp purposes, triggering the 33% reduction in benefits (i.e., every \$3 increase in income for food stamps results in a \$1 reduction in food stamp benefits).

Another potential approach is a wage supplement program, which are cash payments given on top of earnings from wages, usually intended to raise a participant's income to a certain level (such as 135% of the federal poverty line). Supplements can be a flat amount to all participants, or they can vary based on work hours, number of family members, or other criteria. In a wage supplement program, the participant keeps all of his or her earnings from wages and receives the supplement on top of that amount. States and localities, including Connecticut and Milwaukee, have designed programs in which those receiving wage supplements are still in the TANF program. The other programs required the individual to leave traditional TANF assistance entirely in order to receive the supplement. In the past, states have used federal TANF funding and state MOE funds to pay for wage supplement programs. Generally, these programs ran for short durations, usually paying supplements for 2-3 years before terminating.

In general, wage supplement programs have seen considerable success. A report by the Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation (MDRC) details three state programs and the Canadian program; according to the report *these programs increased incomes, employment, and earnings of participants as much as 10-15% above that of traditional TANF participants*. Some of the programs managed to achieve these results at a considerably lower cost for the state than traditional TANF assistance, the catch being that the benefits did not last beyond the duration of the supplement program.

Why Institute a Wage Supplement Program?

Supplement programs will certainly not be helpful for all TANF participants in New York, a number of who are disabled or have serious barriers to employment. However, for those able to work or currently employed part-time, wage supplements have several advantages over traditional TANF assistance. In addition, a supplement program could be useful for the state, as well. Potential benefits include:

Increases in Income, Earnings, and Employment: the MDRC research found that wage supplements typically increased earnings by about \$200-\$300 per month, and income by about \$350-\$500 per month, above traditional assistance. Note that this was the result even with the traditional welfare work control group receiving the earned income tax credit (EITC) incentive. Employment was also increased by between 10-15%. Importantly, this increase in employment was not only due to previously unemployed individuals getting jobs but also currently part-time employed persons increasing their work hours. For many program participants, this meant a switch from part-time to full-time work.

Most notably, the wage supplements had the most positive impacts for welfare participants receiving welfare for more than 5 years and with one or more barriers to employment. They saw income increases of nearly \$200 a month and employment increases of 7%. These modest improvements are impressive considering the multiple barriers often faced by these individuals.

Cost: depending on program design, a wage supplement program can be fairly modest, largely due to the fact that the payment structure for the supplements is more streamlined and administrative costs are much lower than traditional assistance programs. The Canadian program, for example, only cost \$200 per participant per year, not including the costs of the supplements themselves. Other state programs were more expensive: the Minnesota program spent about \$1,900 more per year for each family over and above what was spent on the control group. The costs came primarily from the program's more generous earnings disregard and the ability of families to continue receiving Medicaid. The Milwaukee program was more costly because eligibility was expanded to include working poor families who would not have received welfare. The program spent about \$4,000 per group member on its services and work supports, net of savings to various public assistance programs.

Reduced Caseloads: if the supplement program is designed so that participants leave TANF assistance, the state can close these cases. Thus a large-scale wage supplement program could result in a significantly reduced caseload for New York state. With the new regulations making work participation rates much more difficult to achieve, any program with the potential to reduce caseloads may be attractive to the state.

On the other hand, the state could benefit from still counting individuals receiving supplements as part of its TANF program since these individuals can be counted towards the participation rates. Wage supplements typically increase work hours and boost full-time employment.

How Can New York Design a Wage Supplement Program?

There is no one way to distribute wage supplements, and design will vary based on the size and nature of the population receiving the supplement, the budget available, and the other services offered by the program, if any. That said, programs in the other states have revealed several features any wage supplement program must include if it is to be successful. These include:

A. The supplement must offer a sizeable economic advantage over traditional assistance to convince TANF participants to switch off of welfare.

While what constitutes a “sizeable advantage” needs to be determined for New York, the supplement amount utilized in the programs studied ranged from \$278 more than the welfare grant to \$140 each month.

Participants in the wage supplement program must remain eligible for child care subsidies, paid at the same level as TANF participants and not subject to waitlists.

The child care subsidy is incredibly valuable for working parents; often it is larger than the shelter allowance and basic grant combined. The subsidy for a single parent with two children over six, for example, would be \$704 per month; the basic grant and shelter allowance together pay only \$691. The amount of subsidy varies based on number and age of children and whether they are in full or part-time care, but very few TANF participants would leave that program for a wage supplement if it meant losing child care assistance. Once the supplement program ends, low-income child care subsidies should be made available to these individuals.

B. The wage supplement program must be linked to a career advancement plan for its participants, one that includes vocational training and education intended to produce higher earnings and move the participant up the job ladder.

Unfortunately, wage supplement programs do not produce lasting gains on their own: the beneficial effects of wage supplements fade quickly once the program itself ends. The MDRC report reports that the gains in employment, income, and earnings produced by the wage supplement programs had all but disappeared one year after the programs terminated.

Career advancement meant to produce long-term increases in earnings and employment could take a variety of forms, including vocational educational training, on-the-job training, or career counseling and assistance (or some combination of these). The Arkansas Work Pays wage supplement program, for example, has participants and caseworkers work one-on-one to develop and implement an extensive career advancement plan, including strategies to earn promotions and pay increases, and assistance in accessing training opportunities.

In addition, the programs in the other states provided additional options which New York may want to incorporate into its wage supplement program. These include:

1. The supplement can be designed to reward individuals working part-time to gain full-time employment, as well as encouraging new employment.

The program can be tailored so that full-time work is rewarded. This can be done by increasing the supplement amount as work hours increase.

2. Make available community service jobs or transitional employment program jobs for individuals who cannot find sufficient paid employment.

The Milwaukee New Hope Project provided, in addition to the monthly earnings supplement, community service jobs for up to six months for individuals who could not find jobs or were not able to increase their part-time hours. As a result of the community service jobs, New Hope experienced large initial employment effects wherein about 32% of the program group took advantage of such jobs in the first 2 years for an average of 6 months.

Open up eligibility for the wage supplement to low-income people who are not receiving welfare assistance.

The Milwaukee New Hope Project was designed for households with income less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold at the time of program entry who were interested in working 30 hours or more per week – including non-welfare recipient households. The program was not designed to neither explicitly discourage nor encourage welfare receipt. Working might have allowed some households to receive welfare benefits by helping them fulfill Wisconsin’s requirement that welfare recipients work.

Transitional Jobs Programs

Transitional jobs are time-limited, publicly subsidized jobs that combine real work, skill development, and support services to help participants overcome substantial barriers to employment and transition participants successfully into the labor market.

Transitional jobs are moving long-term welfare recipients and other hard-to-employ adults into the workforce. The majority of program graduates—81 to 94 percent—go on to find unsubsidized employment averaging \$7 to \$10 per hour to start.

Paid Transitional Employment can easily be incorporated into New York State’s TANF implementation strategy:

1. The time participants spent in subsidized employment (in the case of a government driven program) or unsubsidized employment (in the case of a business driven program) would count as core work activities. Participants need to engage in “core” work activities for a minimum of 20 hours.
2. Participants can engage in “non-core” activities for the remaining 10 hours of required work participation (for single parent households), including job skills training directly related to employment, education directly related to employment, and attendance in a secondary school or GED program.

Increase the PA Earnings Disregard: also Repeal Standard of Need cap that prevents families from earning their way out of poverty

New York can increase its Earned Income Disregard (EID) levels. The EID encourages employment by ensuring that a welfare recipient's grant is not decreased one dollar for every dollar of earnings.

The first \$90 of earnings does not reduce the welfare grant at all. Beyond the initial \$90, the grant is reduced by 53 cents for every additional \$1.00 earned. For example, a recipient working 30 hours a week, at a wage of \$7.15 an hour, would earn \$930 a month. The first \$90 of earnings would be disregarded but the welfare grant would be reduced by \$445 --- 53% of the remaining \$840. If the recipient were entitled to a \$691 monthly grant without earnings, the grant with earnings would be reduced to \$246.

The recipient keeps the \$930 from wages and \$246 (\$691 minus \$445) in TANF benefits for a total monthly income of \$1,176, 15% below the federal poverty guideline of \$1,383 for a family of this size.

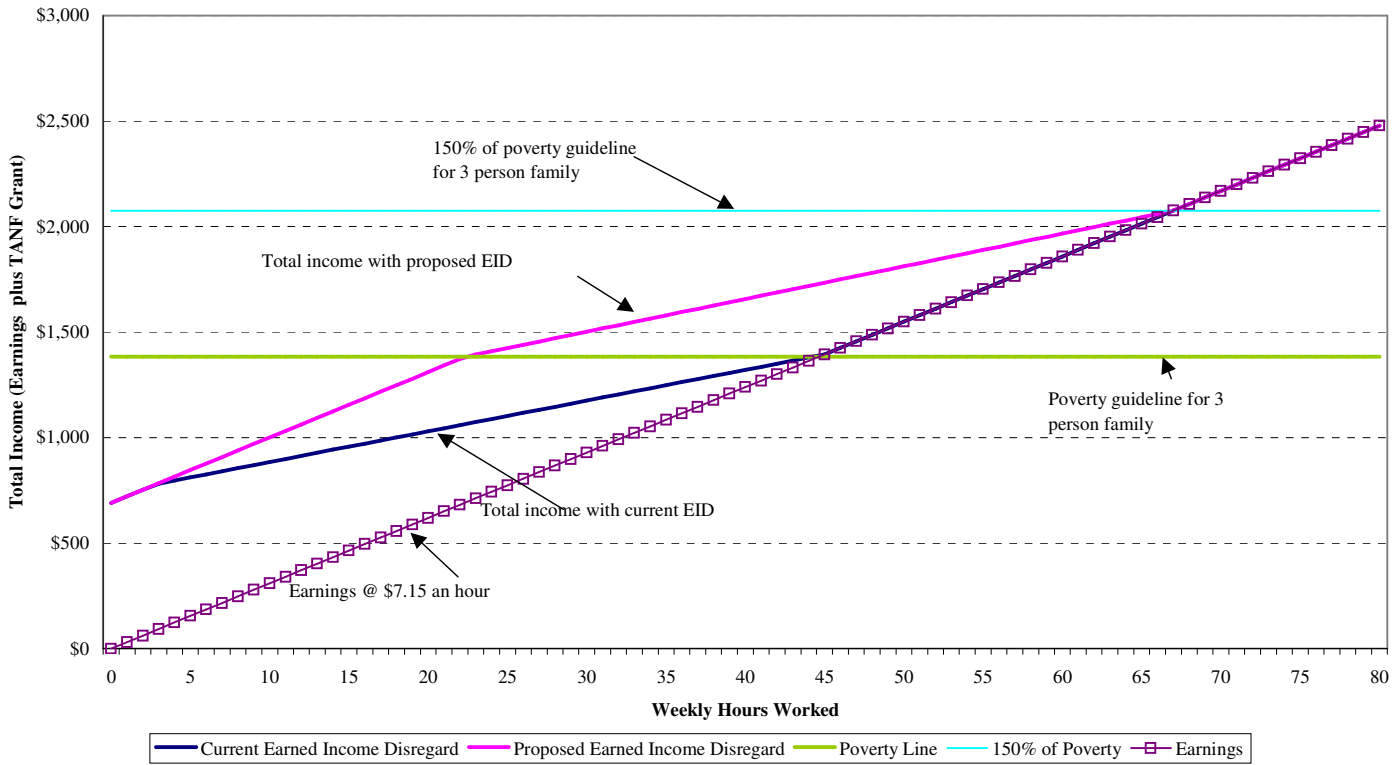
Although New York's earned income disregard is relatively generous, TANF grants to families are reduced before the family's income reaches the federal poverty level and all TANF assistance is phased out as income hits the poverty guideline. For example, the federal poverty guideline for a single mom with two children is \$1,383 for 2006. The family in the previous example lost \$445 in TANF benefits even though its income was still \$200 a month below the federal poverty guideline. Under the current EID, a recipient with two children working 40 hours a week earning \$8.15 an hour (just \$1.00 an hour more than the January 2007 New York State minimum wage) would not qualify for TANF assistance.

A revamped EID would not reduce TANF benefits at all until a family's income reached the poverty guidelines. The recipient family in our previous example working 30 hours a week at \$7.15 an hour would keep \$930 from wages plus all but \$119 of its TANF grant bringing its income up to \$1,502 --- 9% above the federal poverty guidelines.¹ A recipient working 40 hours a week at \$8.15 an hour would continue to receive \$331 in cash assistance.

The Connecticut Jobs First program adopted an enhanced EID that allowed welfare recipients to keep the full amount of their earnings as well as their cash assistance up to the Federal Poverty Level for up to 21 months in addition to their full welfare and Food Stamp grant, leading to increased employment, earnings and income.

¹ This assumes a 50% disregard of income above the federal poverty guidelines but this disregard percentage could be set higher or lower depending on policy decisions about eligibility limits. At 50%, families would be eligible for cash assistance until their incomes reach 150% of the federal poverty guidelines. A 40% disregard would provide assistance to families only up to 135% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Proposed New Earned Income Disregard



Appendixes

Welfare shelter allowance compared to HUD Fair Market Rates

County	Shelter Allowance, Family of 3 (\$/mo)	HUD Fair Market Rent for 2 Bedroom apt (amt in \$)
Albany	309	715
Allegany	273	530
Broome	290	546
Cattaraugus	269	538
Cayuga	290	566
Chautauqua	285	535

Chemung	283	599
Chenango	264	542
Clinton	275	610
Columbia	290	667
Cortland	281	592
Delaware	274	547
Dutchess	412	998
Erie	301	625
Essex	268	574
Franklin	259	524
Fulton	272	578
Genesee	294	620
Greene	281	630
Hamilton	267	580
Herkimer	275	567
Jefferson	276	602
Lewis	279	535
Livingston	307	656
Madison	304	586
Monroe	343	656
Montgomery	283	528
Nassau	445	1280
Oneida	287	567
Onondaga	303	586
Ontario	308	656
Orange	421	998
Orleans	302	656
Oswego	300	586
Ostego	280	567
Putnam	441	1133
Rensselaer	296	715
Rockland	434	1133
St.Lawrence	281	537
Saratoga	316	715
Schenectady	311	715
Schoharie	286	715
Schuyler	275	571
Seneca	288	616
Steuben	271	571
Suffolk	447	1280
Sullivan	297	694
Tioga	285	546
Tompkins	317	735
Ulster	350	766
Warren	299	630
Washington	295	630
Wayne	302	656
Westchester	426	1316
Wyoming	279	556
Yates	286	568

The Rise in the Cost of Common Items Over 16 Years

	1990	2006	%Increase
Foods			
Milk (Skim, half gallon carton)	\$.68	\$1.32	94
Eggs (Large white, 1 dozen)	\$.48	\$.89	85
Lettuce (Iceberg, per head)	\$.59	\$.88	49
Tomatoes (Roma, per lb)	\$.39	\$.99	154
Green Peppers (per lb)	\$.48	\$1.39	190
Cucumbers (each)	\$.25	\$.66	164
Tuna Fish (Empress Light in Water, 6.5 oz can)	\$.58	\$.75	29
Ground Beef (73-80% lean, per lb)	\$.99	\$2.59	161
Pasta Sauce (Ragu, 30 oz)	\$1.49	\$1.79	20
Butter (1lb package)	\$.99	\$2.19	121
Over the Counter Medicines and Toiletries			
Toothpaste (Close-up, 6.4 oz tube)	\$1.77	\$2.99	68
Shampoo (Johnson's Baby Shampoo, 20oz bottle)	\$2.99	\$4.49	50
Deodorant (Mitchim, 2 oz solid)	\$2.67	\$3.49	31
Ibuprofen (Motrin IB, 50 tablets)	\$3.19	\$6.49	103
Anti-histamine (Benadry, 24 tablets)	\$3.79	\$5.49	45
Hydrocortisone Cream (Cortizon-10, 1oz. tube)	\$2.39	\$5.49	129
Cough and Cold Syrup (Dimetapp, 4 oz)	\$2.66	\$5.99	125
Household cleaners, paper products and other items			
Laundry Detergent (Cheer liquid, half gallon)	\$3.49	\$5.99	71
Dishwashing Liquid (Ivory, 22 oz. / 25oz.)	\$1.49	\$2.49	67
Paper Towels (Brawny, 66 sheets / 80 sheets)	\$.48	\$1.99	315
Toilet Paper (Charmin, 4 roll pkg.)	\$1.37	\$3.19	133
Light Bulbs (GE Soft White, 4 pack)	\$1.99	\$2.99	50
Batteries (2 Energizer C or D, or 1 9-volt)	\$1.99	\$3.99	101
Basic Cash Allowance for Welfare (Family of 3)	\$ 238	\$238	0

Other States Have Realized the Importance of Raising the Welfare Grant

States that have raised the welfare grant	1996	2003
California	\$596	\$704, \$786*
Illinois	\$377	\$396
Louisiana	\$190	\$240
Maine	\$418	\$485
Maryland	\$373	\$473
Massachusetts	\$565, \$579*	\$618, \$633*
Mississippi	\$120	\$170
Montana	\$425	\$507
New Hampshire	\$550	\$625
North Dakota	\$431	\$477
Ohio	\$341	\$373
South Carolina	\$200	\$205

South Dakota	\$430	\$483
Texas	\$188	\$213
Utah	\$426	\$474
Vermont	\$597	\$639
Virginia	\$291	\$320
West Virginia	\$253	\$453
Wisconsin**		

New York's Maximum Monthly Benefit has been \$557 since 1990

* When two numbers appear, that state has made a benefit distinction between recipients that are non-exempt and exempt (those numbers appear respectively) from work requirements

** Wisconsin's "W-2 Transition," "Community Service Jobs," "Trial Jobs/Unsubsidized," and "Employment" categories all receive different benefit amounts

Surrounding State's Maximum Monthly Benefit for a Family of Three with No Income (as of 2003)

Connecticut \$543
 Massachusetts \$633 (exempt), \$618 (non-exempt)
 New Hampshire \$625
 New Jersey \$424
 Ohio \$373
 Pennsylvania \$403
 Vermont \$639

Source: The Urban Institute, Welfare Rules Databook
http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411183_WRD_2003.pdf