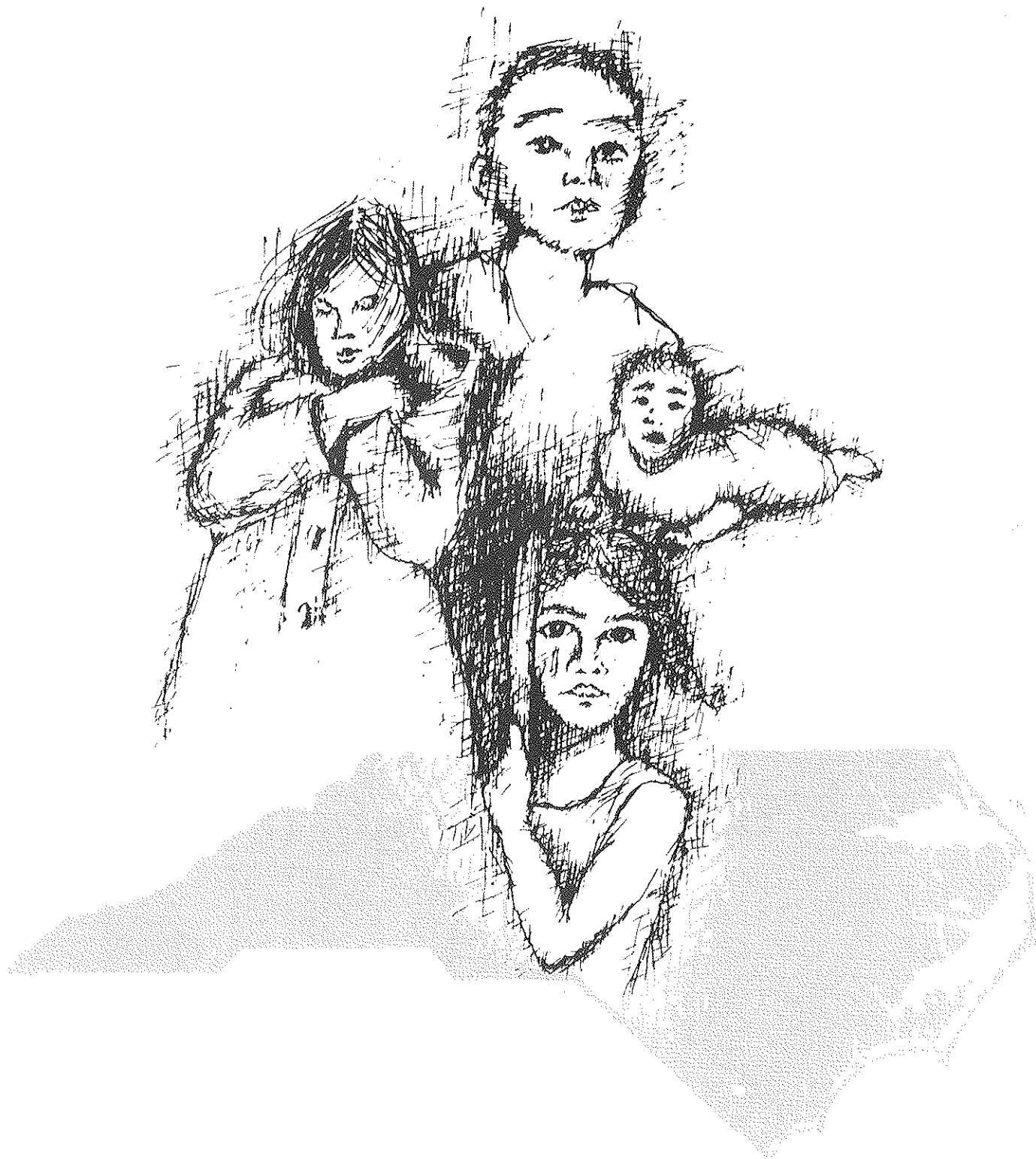


# A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE



**A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE:  
POVERTY OR PROSPERITY AMONG  
NORTH CAROLINA'S FAMILIES**

**Five Major Policy Statements**

**from**

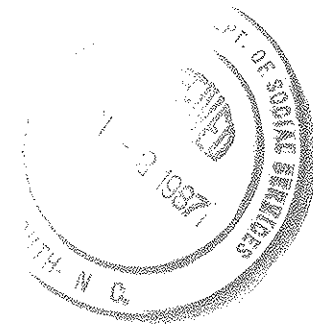
**The Conference on Welfare Reform**

**of**

**The North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services**

**April 14-15, 1987**

**Durham, North Carolina**



## FOREWORD

The North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services has produced a series of recommendations on welfare reform which merit serious attention and thoughtful study. These proposals are the product of very conscientious effort culminating in a recent conference on welfare reform in North Carolina. Since there is such widespread concern today in our state for the need to address the problems of poverty and its companion, illiteracy, it is important that thoughtful North Carolinians participate in serious examination of the recommendations submitted by these experienced and professionally competent individuals.

Our common dedication is to render maximum assistance to families and children in our state who should have and must have our help. It is also essential that as individuals we do our utmost to provide for each of our fellow North Carolinians the opportunity to be gainfully employed and self-sufficient.

For these reasons, I urge your careful and thoughtful study of these recommendations. Hopefully, your own views and opinions will be put into this statewide town meeting where the total effort is directed toward improving the lot of our less fortunate fellow citizens who find themselves suffering from circumstances they did not create and cannot control.

We welcome you to this enormously important undertaking.

William Friday  
President Emeritus  
University of North Carolina

# INTRODUCTION

We in the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services (NCACDSS) are excited about the results of our recent conference on welfare reform and the recommendations which we now have as a result. We feel sure that a concerted effort by people in social services, working in concert with communities across the state, can turn the tide for poor families in North Carolina, and make us all proud of this great state.

Let me tell you a little about our association. NCACDSS is a voluntary association made up of the directors of social services at the county level in North Carolina. At present, ninety-seven of the 100 county directors are members of the association. The association has a long history of involvement in the development of social policy and is affiliated with the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners.

So what can our association say about welfare reform? County Departments of Social Services administer two billion dollars a year in services to families in North Carolina. The Directors' hands-on experiences with the programs and policies which make up our social service system uniquely qualify us to assist in the planning and reform of this system. Directors have seen what works and what doesn't, and we are ready to tell the people of North Carolina what we have learned.

Our association is dedicated to providing the best human services to the families and children who are in need of such assistance. We are equally dedicated to assuring that these programs help North Carolinians become self-sufficient and independent citizens.

These major themes, which are also being played out at the national level, were felt strongly at our recent conference on welfare reform. Directors gathered together to translate our collective experiences into a series of specific policy recommendations. These policy statements cover a broad range of issues, but they are all related to the well-being of families across North Carolina.

We are sharing these recommendations with a variety of state and local officials, businesspeople, the media, and professionals. As you read these statements, we hope that you will be encouraged to think about the conditions of North Carolina's families, and that you will be inspired by the challenges we face in the future. North Carolina's families are the potential winners.

Sue Applewhite, ACSW  
President  
North Carolina Association of  
County Directors of Social Services

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poverty in our society has reached epidemic proportions, especially among our children. The United States is the only country where the largest population in poverty is children. One child in four is born into poverty today, and one child in five will grow up in poverty. The means exist to deal with this problem, and the following are recommendations for a change which will make the future brighter for North Carolina's children.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### A Blueprint for Independence

The Directors recommend a work-training goal for all welfare recipients, with an adequate living allowance for families in transition and with case management to help families negotiate the system.

### Economic Development

The Directors call for a coordinated state-wide effort to deal with the issues of economic development and the shift to a service economy, looking especially at the needs of the state's rural areas.

### Blending Public and Private Funding

The Directors recognize that the public efforts to alleviate the problems of poverty must be linked with private efforts to provide good jobs with adequate wages and benefits and that such efforts will strengthen both the public and private sectors.

### Preventive and Support Services for Families

The Directors foresee the provision of services as a key place in the effort to prevent dependency and support the transition to self-sufficiency. Through case management and education, day care and transportation, and by preventing teen pregnancy, long-term gains can be made.

### Child Support Enforcement

The Directors call for a continued strong emphasis on insisting that parents support their children and recommend specific policy changes to facilitate the enforcement of child support orders.

# A BLUEPRINT FOR INDEPENDENCE

As Social Services Directors, we believe very strongly that public assistance recipients would rather be independent of the welfare system than dependent upon it. At the same time, we recognize our responsibility as professionals and the greater responsibility of society to provide recipients with the education, training, and job opportunities necessary to enable them to reach the goals of increased self-sufficiency, reduction in the duration of welfare dependency, and improved social functioning.

We recommend that the state implement a program of public assistance which blends work programs with adequate benefit levels, which ensures a strong incentive to work while not blaming victims of economic change for problems they did not create. Especially we want to assure that children, who have no control over their circumstances, are not hurt by the program changes and improvements. To this end, we suggest the following program initiatives:

## I. THE WORK-EDUCATION GOAL

### A. The Program Elements

1. Establish a comprehensive program that includes a wide range of educational, training, and work experiences for clients. The program should include:
  - a. A contract to require a customized plan of work, training or education for the client. The plan would take full advantage of available education resources. Minor mothers would be expected to stay in school.
  - b. An individualized assessment to identify needs and goals of clients.
  - c. Educational opportunities ranging from basic literacy to college level.
  - d. Job training based on community job market.
  - e. Supportive services including counseling, day care, transportation, job preparation, and orientation.
  - f. Work experience component.
  - g. Job search services.
2. Target the program to new applicants for public assistance and those that have received public assistance for less than two years.
3. Provide linkage between private sectors/industry, economic development and educational resources that can provide specific and appropriate job training.
4. Overall responsibility for the design of the work programs must rest with human service agencies at the federal and state levels.

### B. Incentives for the Client

1. Clients who comply with their contract would receive a cash incentive as a reward. This is in lieu of the penalty for not complying. The cash incentive should be sufficient to compensate the client for all costs associated with participation.
2. Clients who successfully become employed will be allowed a total disregard of earned income for three months and graduated reduction of disregard over the following three months. No disregard is allowed to the client who voluntarily quits a job. Medicaid coverage would be extended for one year.

### C. Case Management

1. Case management services should be continued at the discretion of the case manager to follow-up and help the client with any problems that arise and could otherwise cause a return to welfare.
2. Case management is defined as the following:  
"Case management is essentially a coordinating process which may include therapeutic intervention. A case manager's sole interest is in securing the best possible service for the client. Often he or she is the only person familiar with the client's total situation. The case manager acts as broker, liason, counselor, watch dog, advocate and enabler." (from Dorothy Harris, NASW President)
3. Recognize that some public assistance clients are not ready for education, training, or employment and provide socialization skills and other specific services to address the problems that inhibit self-sufficiency.

### II. A CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO ADEQUATE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

#### A. The Welfare Benefit Level

1. Establish a Family Living Standard (FLS) based on nationally-set methodology which allows each state's market basket to determine basic living costs.
2. Payment levels should be determined on the basis of the family's actual needs.

#### B. Simplifying the System

1. With the full implementation of the FLS, there should be one payment to include all federal assistance, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Low Income Energy Assistance Program, Food Stamps, nutrition assistance and housing, e.g.
2. There should be one single application simplifying the system for clients and eliminating wasteful administrative procedures.

### III. OVERALL DESIGN ISSUES

#### A. Flexibility

Emphasize local flexibility in program design to recognize local job markets, rural vs. urban nature of counties, and level of available support services and resources.

#### B. Administration

Broader issues of the social services system need to be examined such as the effect of state and county administration and the problems resulting from complex guidelines and criteria.

#### C. Equity Within the State

Adequate resources must be made available to each county in an equitable manner. The availability of services and the uniformity of employee workloads throughout the state are issues which must be addressed.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

It is consistent with the belief in self-sufficiency that County Directors of Social Services should be involved in economic development. We believe in the goal of full employment and that it is consistent with the goal of self-sufficiency. An investment in economic development includes an investment in education, transportation, and supportive services.

We recommend the following:

1. There must be a coordinated effort at both the local and state level to:
  - a. Share information between and among agencies concerning the services and resources available for purposes of economic development
  - b. Share resources at the multi-county level and to oppose feelings of turfism, in an effort to help those counties whose resources are limited.
2. A Department of Social Services representative should be appointed to serve on each of the Private Industry Councils in the state, as well as on the State Employment Training Council.
3. Economic development should consider the social ramifications for a community along with the economic benefits; a comprehensive community impact statement looking at these issues should be required as a part of any economic development plan.
4. While economic development results in both gainers and losers, the overall benefits accrue to the state. Therefore, a system needs to be developed to share these economic benefits with counties which are the losers in this competitive effort to attract new investment.
5. Economic development is not the primary responsibility of the Social Services system; the systems which are responsible for economic development should be required to coordinate their efforts with the Department of Social Services.
6. Business and industry must have financial incentives to create good jobs for low-income families to allow them to participate in the benefits of economic development.
7. Communities must continue to promote access to technical assistance resources for low-income people. They must create a sense of ownership and responsibility with Chambers of Commerce, Private Industry Councils, the Employment Security Commission, and community colleges and strive to coordinate their efforts.
8. Strong support should be given for the efforts of the newly-formed North Carolina Rural Economic Development Council.
9. The state should encourage the development of small employee-owned businesses through the provision of expanded technical assistance and venture grants.

# BLENDING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING

The Directors believe that citizens have the right and responsibility to provide their families with the basic needs of food, shelter, health care, and clothing. Such an opportunity should be available through gainful employment that has adequate pay and benefits.

The private sector has an enlightened self-interest in a healthy public sector, as the public sector has an enlightened self-interest in the private sector. The private sector has an interest in insuring adequately trained employees, appropriate day care for the working parent, and other employee benefits that supplement wages. The public sector is interested in job creation for an enhanced tax base, reduced public expenditures and improved economic conditions.

Public and private sectors should coordinate efforts to cause creative and innovative activities to take place in order to enhance services, improve productivity and increase efficiency. Collectively, efforts can be made to move people out of poverty, as it is not a question of national means, rather national commitment.

In order to accomplish this, we recommend the following:

1. **A Fair Minimum Wage:**

The minimum wage should be established at a level adequate enough to provide the average size family with children an income at the poverty level.
2. **Incentives for Private Sector Employment of Welfare Recipients:**

Enhance tax credits, grant diversions, and other incentives for private sector employers who hire welfare recipients.
3. **Incentives for Businesses to Provide Benefits:**

Establish incentives in the private sector for the provision of health and child care benefits to workers. This would encourage welfare recipients to enter the job market, making it possible for them to become self-sufficient.
4. **Tax Laws Which Protect Charitable Giving:**

Federal and state tax laws should provide incentives to individuals, corporations, and other organizations to participate in charitable giving. This would enhance the possibility of blending public and private funds to care for the needy by encouraging greater participation from the private section.
5. **A Recycling of Funds:**

Establish federal and state policy to allow welfare dollars saved when recipients become employed to be recycled back into the local agency to be used for supportive services. This would provide incentive for local agencies to move public assistance recipients into gainful employment.
6. **Foundation Funding for Special Efforts:**

Use foundations/corporations as source of funding for unique local needs. Funds could be appropriately utilized for pilot projects, planning and evaluation.
7. **Fair Tax Laws for the Working Poor:**

Actions to increase the net income of the working poor, such as the 1986 tax reform legislation, should be continued. Additionally, the earned income tax credit should be increased.

# PREVENTIVE AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR FAMILIES

The Directors recognize the family as the best structure for the growth, development and protection of its individual members. At the same time, prevention and support are seen as the key ways to help our families reach self-sufficiency. Rather than undermining families' own coping skills, prevention and supportive services aid families to work, provide for their families, and nip small problems before they get beyond their control. Communities with strong services, both public and private, create a positive environment for all their citizens and are better able to attract business and industry to provide jobs for their people.

We believe that most families seeking help from the Department of Social Services can and want to improve their situation. Because their presenting problem is frequently a cry for help that reaches beyond the spoken request, timely screening, accurate problem identification, and playful intervention is needed. The intervention should be accomplished with maximum participation of and full respect for the family's needs and goals. In this way, families become partners in the helping process and have responsibility for their own behaviors and well-being.

The utilization of social work skills through one-on-one contact or in groups has been shown to be effective in helping families. Examples of positive results are found in innovative teen pregnancy projects, preventive services programs, permanency planning, and in work and training programs. We have the moral and professional responsibility to provide adequate and cost-effective preventive services to families seeking our help and to the community at large.

We recommend the following:

1. A concentration on teen pregnancy and parenting:  
Emphasize prevention of teenage pregnancy and encourage services to adolescent parents by doing the following:
  - a. Expand adolescent parenting programs to all counties and add seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds and other children at risk (such as siblings) to the program.
  - b. Support national, state and local consortia to plan, design and evaluate teen pregnancy initiatives aimed at prevention and support of services. Create a Center for State Action on Adolescent Pregnancy.
  - c. Expand the role of the Departments of Social Services to include community organizing and advocacy in the area of teen pregnancy.
  - d. Work to keep teen-age mothers in school and to delay second pregnancies.
2. An emphasis on public education:  
Strengthen public education for low-income children and support the work of the schools with parents including preparing children for school and assuring they make maximum academic progress, and at a minimum, complete high school.
3. Support for day care:  
Increase access to and availability of affordable, quality day care to meet the developmental needs of children and to assist families working toward self-sufficiency.
4. Support for transportation:  
Provide access to affordable public transportation, when possible, and work with government authorities to solve the problems of transportation in our rural communities, thus allowing our citizens the ability to maintain gainful employment.
5. Funding for case management:
  - a. Shift public assistance program emphasis from routine processing of cases to family problem identification and problem solving. There is a need to teach family problem-solving skills to clients.
  - b. Utilize screening and assessment at intake for the purpose of diversion and prevention to avoid the need for long-term public assistance. Refer to appropriate services and establish negotiated contracts with clients to aim for achievable goals.
6. Adequate support services which are:
  - a. Delivered privately, where appropriate, for all social and income levels;
  - b. Administered under community oversight to assure all groups are adequately served;
  - c. Built in as a necessary part of any primary program or activity.

# CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM

It is the obligation of every parent to support his or her children. It is also the basic right of all children to be supported by their parents. When parents fail to meet their financial obligation to children, child support should be pursued and obtained through a unified program for all children that is legally enforceable.

Because of the complexity of the Child Support Program in North Carolina and nationwide, we recommend and promote the following as a means to provide enhancement and consistency in all matters involving the financial support of children:

1. There should be one uniform child support system in North Carolina and nationwide that provides all child support services.
2. In North Carolina there should be mandatory staffing patterns and levels of service that are enforceable by the state and federal governments.
3. Child support services must be available to all children regardless of economic standing and child support agencies should recognize that public cost avoidance is as positive as public cost recovery.
4. Paternity for children should be established at birth or as soon as feasible through the quickest legal remedy available.
5. All legal separations should address the financial support and care of children.
6. In North Carolina there should be a legal requirement for wage withholding at the time a support order is established.
7. The State of North Carolina should immediately pursue creating, financing and implementing a comprehensive automated child support computer system at all levels that are involved in child support activities.
8. There should be mandatory presumptive child support guidelines.
9. The federal government should require states to provide the same priority to interstate child support proceedings as states give to their own proceedings.

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