

Tufts study shows, state welfare reform policies are failing

by Marianna Wertz

A study released Feb. 23 by Tufts University's Center on Hunger and Poverty, finds that the large majority of state programs adopted under the 1996 Federal welfare reform, are failing to improve the economic well-being of welfare recipients, and in many cases, have worsened their standards of living. This is the first comprehensive study of the effect

of the welfare laws that have been adopted since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). It underscores the accuracy of the warnings, from civil rights advocates, labor union and political leaders, including Lyndon LaRouche, who strongly opposed President Clinton's signing of this legislation, and who warned of its harmful consequences.

The study, "Are States Improving the Lives of Poor Families? A Scale Measure of State Welfare Policies," states that, in passing PRWORA, both the President and Congress (Republican and Democratic members), held that their proposed welfare changes "were a prescription to improve the economic well-being of poor Americans on public assistance. While many proponents stressed the need for tough medicine to motivate people to work, and many others spoke of the need for greater job opportunity and decent pay, virtually all who voted for this historic policy change trumpeted it as a vehicle to improve the financial conditions for poor families."

Taking PRWORA's proponents at their word, the study measured whether the states, on 34 key decision points, have adopted policies which will increase or decrease family economic security. Their overall finding is that more than two-thirds of the states are in fact now "disinvesting in the poor," instead of helping them to improve their lives.

The importance of the study is not just this finding, however. LaRouche and others (including Peter B. Edelman, who quit the Clinton administration over the issue and contributed to this study) had already publicly warned that the intention of the Gingrichites who rammed through PRWORA was to implement a fascist-style labor recycling policy. Its importance, rather, is that it comes from an academic institution with some standing among people who care about such things, and it will therefore lend weight to the fight which is already going on around the nation, to stop these Nazi policies, before thousands of people begin dying on our city streets.

What the study found

The accompanying table indicates the scores of the 50 states, relative to the 34 key decision points—the "Tufts Scale"—which formed the basis of the study. The study com-

TABLE 1

Most states fail to improve economic security under welfare reform block grants

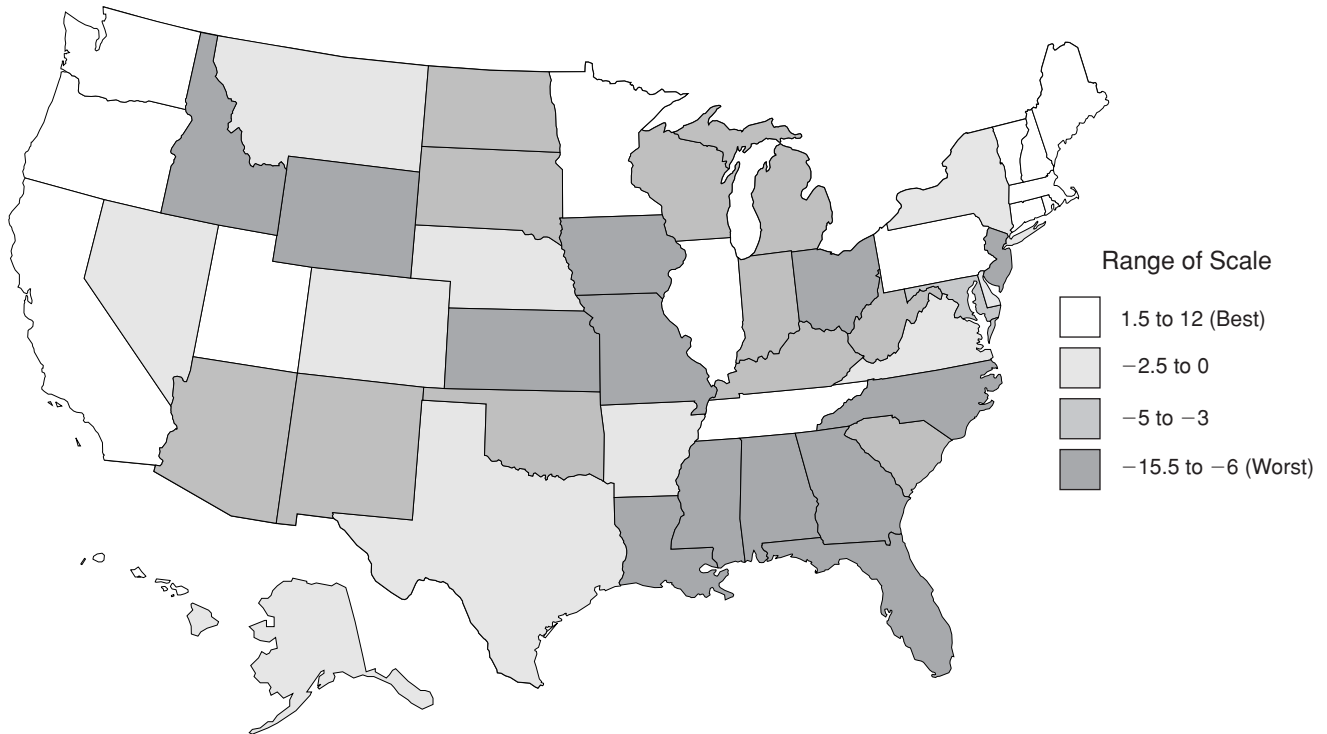
(Tufts Scale Score)

State	Rank	Score	State	Rank	Score
Vermont	1	7.0	Michigan	27	-5.5
Oregon	2	4.5	Iowa	27	-5.5
New Hampshire	3	1.5	Oklahoma	29	-6.0
Massachusetts	4	1.0	Ohio	29	-6.0
Washington	5	0.5	New Mexico	29	-6.0
Rhode Island	5	0.5	Nebraska	29	-6.0
Maine	5	0.5	North Dakota	29	-6.0
Connecticut	5	0.5	Kentucky	29	-6.0
Pennsylvania	9	0.0	Hawaii	29	-6.0
Utah	10	-0.5	Arizona	29	-6.0
Minnesota	11	-1.0	South Dakota	37	-7.0
Illinois	11	-1.0	Indiana	37	-7.0
California	11	-1.0	Wisconsin	39	-8.0
Tennessee	14	-1.5	Missouri	39	-8.0
Texas	15	-2.5	New Jersey	40	-8.5
New York	15	-2.5	Louisiana	40	-8.5
Delaware	15	-2.5	Florida	43	-9.0
Montana	18	-3.0	North Carolina	44	-9.5
Virginia	19	-3.5	Alabama	45	-10.0
West Virginia	20	-4.0	Wyoming	46	-11.0
Arkansas	20	-4.0	Kansas	46	-11.0
Colorado	22	-4.5	District of Columbia	46	-11.0
South Carolina	23	-5.0	Georgia	49	-11.5
Nevada	23	-5.0	Mississippi	50	-13.0
Maryland	23	-5.0	Idaho	51	-15.5
Alaska	23	-5.0			

Source: Tufts University Center on Hunger and Poverty, February 1998.

FIGURE 1

Changes in state welfare policies: impact on family economic security



pared each state’s welfare program in effect on Oct. 1, 1997, with its previous welfare program, with respect to specific provisions affecting economic security of poor families with children. Comparisons are quantified by “change” or “difference” scores, indicating change in the provision from a state’s old welfare program to its new one.

The 34 key decision points are grouped into the following categories in the Tufts Scale:

- Benefit levels and eligibility
- Time limits for receipt of benefits
- Work requirements and related sanctions
- Assistance in obtaining work
- Income and asset enhancement
- Availability of subsidized child care
- Special provisions for legal immigrant families

The study found that 42 states have adopted policies under PRWORA’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grants, that are likely to worsen the economic security of poor families. Eight states (Vermont, Oregon, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Washington, Rhode Island, Maine and Connecticut) have implemented policies that are likely to improve poor families’ economic security.

The one area which improved in all states, except Wyoming, was child care. This reflects the fact that politicians

who say they are “pro-family” can’t easily force mothers of small children (12 weeks old in the case of Wisconsin) out to work without providing some care. However, the reality is that most such programs are underfunded and poorly staffed, and a very poor substitute for a mother’s care.

Perhaps one of the best measures of the hypocrisy which surrounded the 1996 Congressional debate over welfare reform, is indicated by the results of the law’s implementation in those states whose Congressmen and state officials fought hardest for “states rights” with respect to welfare laws. The leaders of California, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Wisconsin, were particularly active, according to the report, in efforts to obtain greater state prerogatives. All of these states, except California, are now doing worse than their peers in terms of promoting the economic security of recipient families. Ohio and New Jersey scored among the worst in the nation. While California scored among the top 14 states, several of its newer, more draconian policies, were not implemented until after the October 1997 cutoff date of the study.

The majority of states are “failing and failing badly,” according to the Tufts study. Perhaps more people will now listen to the warnings of LaRouche and other leaders, before our nation takes more steps down this path to hell.