

WELFARE REFORM

LWVNYS action on welfare reform is taken under this LWVUS position.

The League has worked since 1970 for a decent level of public assistance and curtailment of repressive and punitive welfare legislation in New York State. Support has been given to cost of living increases in public assistance allowances. In 1973, the League was successful in securing the restoration of a 10% cut in benefits, which had been passed during the budget crisis of 1971. In 1972 and in 1981, the League successfully lobbied for both a general increase, and an energy-related increase. In 1989 a year of state budget austerity, League successfully supported legislation to increase public assistance benefits by 15%.

LWVUS opposed the Family Support Act of 1988, citing inadequate funding and mandatory participation quotas for job training programs. Concerned League activists worked at the state and local levels to shape Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs to provide the best possible education and job training.

In the 1994 session, legislation was introduced and passed by the legislature to expand the pilot Home Relief fingerprinting project. The League opposed this legislation based on the lack of clear evidence that this process would have the desired result—fraud prevention and cost savings. The savings noted in the two pilot projects may have been the result of deterring bona fide recipients from seeking genuinely needed assistance.

After the governor's proposed budget was introduced in early February 1995, the League joined with other advocacy organizations to oppose reductions in funding for programs and services vital to the welfare of children and families throughout NYS. Governor Pataki's budget proposed a dramatic change in the way child welfare services are funded by the state Department of Social Services. The 1995-96 State Budget created a block grant for Family and Children Services, both merging and cutting funding for multiple child welfare programs.

The Executive Budget for the 1996-97 Fiscal Year contained proposals for welfare reform predicated upon presumed federal action that would be employment-based, limit the time recipients could receive benefits, and essentially hand over welfare to the states. The League monitored this effort to reform welfare and urged the governor, and the leadership in the Senate and the Assembly to make this reform more than symbolic politics. Support was given for reform that would prevent or reduce poverty and promote sustained self-sufficiency for individuals and families. When the 1996 legislative session ended in early July the outcome of federal reform was uncertain and ideological differences between the Assembly and the governor prevented a bipartisan compromise on welfare reform. In the final budget; the proposed time limits, benefit cuts, block grants to local governments, and earnings disregard failed to be adopted.

In August 1996 President Clinton signed The Personal Responsibility Act of 1996, ending an era when entitlement to cash assistance was assumed and the oversight of the welfare system was carried out by the federal government. All states were faced with developing welfare reform designed to implement the new federal requirements. The federal reform requires that 50% of all adults in single parent

families and 90% of adults in two parent families will have to fulfill the work requirements by 2002. In November, the governor announced his reform proposal: New York Works. In an effort to prevent the negative effects this reform would have at the local level, local Leagues were urged to schedule appointments with their Department of Social Services Commissioners to discuss reform and seek answers to specific questions. This provided the information necessary for lobbying based on the local effects of welfare reform.

The state League along with six other organizations released a joint position statement addressing the following pivotal provisions in the reform debate: expansion of alternative sources of income support such as child support and the state earned income tax credit; child care; transitional benefits including health care coverage; follow-up case management and other support services that help maintain someone in employment; and workable models for providing sufficient funding for training and transportation needs. In addition to these provisions, we supported expansion of the Child Assistance Program (CAP) to all counties with the local share of the administrative costs to be borne by the state and increased funding for preventive family planning services. The League opposed any reduction in cash benefits, a cashless Safety Net Program (vouchers), and allowing counties the option of accepting their funds in the form of a block grant.

During the 2000 through 2007 legislative sessions, the League has supported and will continue to support funding for childcare and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in the New York State budget.