

# Welfare 'Freeze' May Heighten City Race Crisis This Summer

By JOHN R. SULLIVAN  
(NC News Service)

In 1967, as Congress was considering a large hike in Social Security benefits for the elderly, widows and their children — benefit increases which all agreed were much needed — the House suddenly attached to the bill a measure which could very well contribute to the urban racial crisis in 1968.

While voting to increase benefits to Social Security recipients, the House and Senate voted to put a "freeze" on federal welfare payments under the Aid to Families of Dependent Children (AFDC) program — the largest and, according to most experts in the field, the most needed of public welfare's half-dozen aid categories.

This freeze, which goes into effect on July 1, was largely criticized as an "anti-Negro" measure, an expression of Congressional white backlash in the wake of 1967's big-city riots, and a harsh reply to spokesmen of the nation's growing welfare rights movement.

**THAT CRITICISM** is apparently accurate. The measure was voted by a House committee the day after a group of welfare mothers staged a demonstration at the Capitol; one Congressman labeled them "a bunch of brood mares."

But the freeze, which is going to either cost the states large sums of money if they are to keep the AFDC payments at their present level for all applicants, or will cost the recipients money in terms of decreased payments, had its roots in a trend which has been alarming legislators and welfare administrators for several years.

In the 10 years between 1951 and 1961 the number of children receiving AFDC aid rose 60% in terms of absolute numbers, or from 3.2% of all children to 4%. In the past seven years, the rate of increase has been even higher. In 1967, about 5% of all children were receiving AFDC payments.

**THE COST OF** this aid in the same period doubled. In 1958 there were 729,385 families receiving an average of \$101 monthly under AFDC. By November, 1967, there were nearly 1.3 million families receiving an average of \$150. Yet during that same period,

the number of old-age assistance recipients decreased by some 400,000, to slightly more than 2 million.

The numbers of new welfare recipients and the spiraling cost of aiding them has upset many legislators. Yet they see no end to the trend.

While these figures have upset the officials who must ask taxpayers for the money to provide welfare, other trends have upset welfare recipients themselves and those who seek increased welfare benefits for them.

For example:

—Although the average payment to families more than doubled between 1950 and 1967, cost-of-living increases wiped out any possible gains. In fact, the one fairly stable welfare statistic is that which describes the amount by which payments fall short of providing simple subsistence — about 12%.

—ALTHOUGH THE number of AFDC families receiving aid nearly doubled between 1958 and 1967, it is estimated that between one-third and one-half of those eligible under present laws do not receive any help.

—About 8 million people receive welfare assistance of some kind — old age, disablement, medical assistance, aid to the blind, general assistance, and AFDC. Even if that number were half what it should be under the present laws — 16 million — it would leave untouched many more millions of "The Other America," perhaps as many as 30 million people ineligible for public aid, yet whose income is low enough to put them below the official poverty level of about \$3,300 for a family of four.

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders acknowledged these shortcomings, and urged that all those eligible for welfare be helped, that payments be increased to meet the minimum requirements of decent, if not comfortable, living, and asked that a system of income maintenance — a negative income tax or family allowance, perhaps — be studied.

**THIS IS FAR** from a complete catalogue of all the criticisms of the welfare system. In fact, there are many more complaints voiced by administrators and recipients alike — so many that it often appears that welfare has no friends at all.

The Civil Disorders Commission itself added other criticisms: complicated regulations hamper the most needy, who are usually poorly educated and least able to understand them; the constant checking conveys to welfare recipients the impression that they are considered untrustworthy, potential thieves, liars and cheats; some investigations infringe on constitutional rights to privacy; residence requirements serve to inhibit the right to travel and keep new arrivals off the rolls; social services are inadequate and only "compound the problems."

**BUT PERHAPS** the most pervasive complaint — and the one most troubling to Negroes, to the churches and to welfare administrators themselves — is that the welfare system, rather than aiding families to cope with their difficulties, hinders them and often introduces new problems into lives already overburdened.

Why? Lack of money — which leads to discouragement and which forces children and heads

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By M. J. MURRAY

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of families to look outside their homes for escape from their dreary plight — is perhaps the first reason. In 1961 nearly half the families receiving AFDC found that the aid fell short of their minimum needs.

In six states, all AFDC families

were unable to meet their basic needs of housing, food, clothing and other necessary expenses. Across the nation, the average gap between need and payment was \$40 in 1961, according to a survey by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

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