

# Expanded Aid To Families With Dependent Children

RALEIGH -- The General Assembly appropriated \$4.32 million over the next two years to expand aid through the Division of Social Services to North Carolina families with dependent children. Ratified in 1987, the Family Support Act went into effect January 1, 1988.

North Carolina can now provide benefits to some two-parent families when the principal wage earner is recently unemployed. Previously, only families with one parent in the household were eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits.

In addition, the Legislature has modified the way in which AFDC benefits are calculated for

families in which the parent is employed. Under the new formula, family members will remain eligible for Medicaid and cash benefits with income up to 68 percent of the federal poverty level. Previously, families lost AFDC benefits when their income exceeded approximately 32 percent of the federal poverty level.

The General Assembly decided it was in North Carolina's best interest to encourage AFDC recipients to obtain jobs and become self-sufficient. Continuing medical assistance and providing limited wage assistance to AFDC recipients who are working would enable those recipients to keep their jobs, support

their families and become self-sufficient.

The AFDC program provides direct financial support to children deprived of the support of one or both parents because of death, absence from the home, physical or mental incapacity, or unemployment. A family can receive aid for its minor children and for the parent, parents or relative caring for the child.

Experts estimate the new provisions will add 2,500 persons to those already getting AFDC benefits. Approximately 67,500 North Carolina families received AFDC aid in 1987.

Expanding aid to include two-parent family coverage and modifying benefit calculations

were recommended to the 1987 General Assembly by the Indigent Care Study Commission.

Because federal money available for social services will continue to shrink, the 1987 Gen-

eral Assembly created the Social Services Study Commission to look at services delivered through county departments of social service and make recommendations on how to improve benefits and service delivery.

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## Phone Program For Low-Income Families

A new program to assist qualifying low-income persons in establishing telephone service in their homes has been approved by the North Carolina Utilities Commission and became effective March 1, 1988.

Called Link-Up Carolina, the new program provides for a 50 percent reduction to eligible individuals in some of the installation fees charged by the telephone company to establish residential telephone service. This provision is subject to some limitations and qualifications.

"The program is the result of proposals made and approved by the Federal Communications Commission but has been adapted specifically for the citizens of North Carolina," said Robert Freedman, Southern Bell's district manager in Charlotte.

"While telephone use has held steady or improved in recent years to just over 92 percent nationwide, there are nearly seven million households in this country without telephone service," Freedman said. "North Carolina, however, is below the national average by three percent. Link-Up Carolina should remedy that."

To qualify for the Link-Up Carolina discount, recipients must meet four specific requirements: --they must be receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) assistance, or be a recipient of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or receive food stamps;

--they must be living at an address where there has been no telephone service for at least the preceding three months;

--they must not be claimed as a dependent for federal income tax purposes on any other person's tax return unless they are over age 60; and

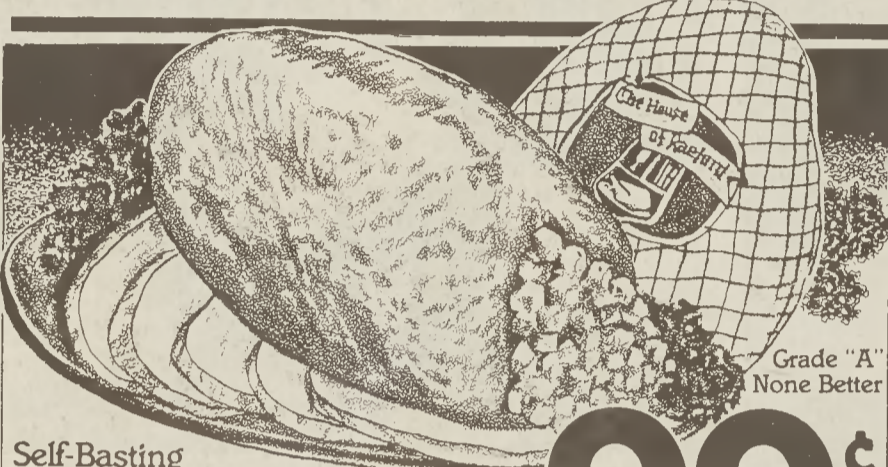
--they are eligible for the discount only once every two years.

Signing up for the program is easy. Freedman urged any individuals who believe they qualify for the discount under this program, or if they know someone else who may qualify, to contact their local telephone business office to place an application for service.

Freedman pointed out that the Link-Up Carolina program contains a number of internal safeguards and verifications including cooperation with local officials.

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