

Black Mother Speaks Out On Welfare System

Dr. Deborah Belle, a research associate, in a study she conducted noted that the most severe problems faced by many single mothers came from the fact that they had little money. "Those with regular sources of income, even if they were low, were less depressed than the mothers who were in a financially desperate state. One out of three women said they lacked money to buy adequate food for their children often."

Mrs. Sharon Collins is a typical example. She is the mother of four children, three sons and one daughter, surviving on an assistance check every two weeks. She discussed at length some of the problems she experienced.

"My children as well as myself are supported by the Department of Public Welfare alone. I receive \$440 each month as well as my food stamps, which total \$171 each month. When I divide the cash grant by five, each member receives \$88 per month. In dividing the food stamps, each one of us receives \$32 each month."

She said \$15 of the \$88 each family member has each month goes to paying rent, which leaves \$72. She said she also has to pay several other bills each month, such as utilities, as well as money for school tokens, which cost approximately \$46 each month. She said she adds \$1 each day for their lunch as well, which totals \$100 a month.

"As you can see, what I receive can't possibly provide my children with the necessary needs each day requires. At the same time, I must buy clothing, shoes, etc, make sure they (the children) have all the school supplies required. I must also buy taxable items to keep them and their clothes sanitary. All of this must come out of the same cash grant I receive each month."

Ms. Collins said the food stamps run out in two weeks, and often it is a long time before another check arrives to help supplement.

"As you can see, neither I nor my children have been living a life of ease. What we are actually doing is living a life by surviving day by day and trying to find a way to survive for tomorrow."

"When children begin school, their needs increase. They wear more soles off their shoes; they must have protection from the cold, rain and snow (i.e. coats). If I didn't somehow meet their needs, I would be breaking the law. I would be branded an unfit mother."

"Presently I am behind in my rent and in the process of being evicted for back rent I owe. My only defense for the situation I am in is that I never had the money to start with. I will not place total blame on myself, because somehow I have survived for 16 years with nothing."

Ms. Collins said, however, that each day it is becoming increasingly more difficult for her to keep her children from going down the wrong path in life.

"My husband was working, and while he was, he supported the family, but then he got laid off and was unable to find a job to support his family and began to steal. In time, like so many he was caught and sent to jail. There they paid for his shelter and meals and clothing and educated."

"But the education he received in prison didn't make it possible for him to obtain a job and become self-supporting or to support his children, so he began to steal again, not long after he was released from prison. So he returns to jail, goes through the same steps, and is in jail again and again and again."

"I blame the system. The system made all the rules, all the choices before I even knew. The system has failed me as well as my children. The system has constantly denied my children the right to freedom and a sound, healthy mind and the right to choose. My children don't have the right to live life as all humans need. They are forced to survive each day at a time."

"I myself have been deprived by the system and I have deprived myself for my children. My life is an injustice to all human life and this injustice is a greater percentage than anyone will speak of."

"I have but one question, and that is, if the courts are here to sit in judgement of injustice, then who is going to sit in judgement of the awesome injustice the system has committed on the human who have been denied any justice at all?"

"I ask this not for myself but as a Black single mother, for my children."

She too is concerned with the impact the budget cuts of the Reagan administration which will begin to take effect on October 1. She is wary of the so-called "workfare" program espoused by Governor Richard Thornberg and she too is concerned of the cutbacks in child care, food stamps and bi-weekly grant she receives.