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Advocates renew call for investment in low-income families

By Rachel Kolokoff Apr 2, 2008



BOSTON — Welfare advocates released a report yesterday faulting the state for not reinvesting more than \$1 billion in cost savings from welfare reform into programs to help low-income residents and their children.

The report, prepared by the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, a liberal think tank, for the Home for Little Wanderers, said mid-1990s welfare reform laws that cut cash assistance in favor of work support programs reduced payments to lower-income families by \$1.3 billion in Massachusetts between 1995 and 2007.

Recommitting funding by expanding educational programs, job training, community support programs and the Earned Income Tax Credit, a refundable credit for workers with low incomes, would help families and satisfy demands for better educated workers with wider skill sets, advocates said.

Joan Wallace-Benjamin, president and CEO of the Home for Little Wanderers, said the savings could have been used to expand services to the poor. Instead, she said, the money went to state programs such as public education, public safety and infrastructure programs that were affected by tax cuts.

"Had the commonwealth maintained spending at the same share of its resources in 2007 as it had in 1995, we would currently be spending an additional 1.3 billion to help lower-income workers provide for their families," Wallace-Benjamin said.

Mary Sarris, executive director of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board, said that using money to better train workers with low incomes would help provide the North Shore with a skilled work force.

"The North Shore economy offers wonderful employment opportunities to those with the appropriate skills and education," Sarris said. "In fact, many jobs remain vacant because companies search long and hard for individuals who have these skills."

She said state officials should be investing more in lower-income family support programs, not less.

"We should be investing in our local labor forces to provide education and training that moves North Shore residents into these jobs, better enabling working parents to provide for their families, filling critical job vacancies, and improving our regional and state economy at the same time," Sarris said.

Richard Jache, director of Child Care Services for the YMCA of North Shore, supported reinvesting money in education and child-care programs. Those programs would help children who need educational support and working parents who rely on child care.

"Through this critical investment, we better prepare our children to excel in school and beyond, and we provide greater support for working parents to achieve self-sufficiency," Jache said.

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