

Up and Out of Poverty Campaign

A right to thrive, not barely survive



Chantale = WHC

ACO/cpi

THE UP AND OUT OF POVERTY CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATIONS

Over 90 organizations have endorsed the Up and Out of Poverty Campaign. A list of these organizations can be found at the end of this booklet. The major organizations working on the campaign who can be contacted for more information are:

Coalition for Basic Human Needs

54 Essex St.
Cambridge, MA 02139
617/497-0126

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless

33 Farnsworth St.
Boston, MA. 02210
617/451-0707

Massachusetts Human Services Coalition

37 Temple Pl., 3d Floor
Boston, MA. 02111
617/482-6119

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

69 Canal St.
Boston, MA 02114
617/742-9250

Women's Campaign for Social Justice

145 Tremont St. #607
Boston, MA 02111
617/426-9734

This booklet was adapted from a 1979 publication by the Downtown Welfare Advocate Center, Inc., New York City.

Many people talk about the economic miracle that is happening in Massachusetts. But at the same time, newspaper headlines repeatedly say that hunger and homelessness are rising. It seems like a contradiction.

It's not. There are thousands of individuals and families who aren't "making it in Massachusetts." One of the main reasons for the increase in hunger and homelessness is that welfare benefits in this state are far below what families need to survive. The AFDC program currently gives a family of three \$539 each month, but that same family requires almost **twice** that amount to meet basic needs.

In 1984, a number of groups began the "Up and Out of Poverty" Campaign to raise welfare benefits above the federal poverty line. This booklet gives a complete picture of the "whats" and "whys" of the campaign and of the need for higher benefits. Welfare recipients have done without for too long. It is time to correct the injustice of forcing families to go hungry and homeless by raising welfare benefits up and out of poverty.

"The public does not know that we, whole families live on incomes of \$539 per month. (1988-89 benefits) Try to find a place to live on this income. Try to feed and clothe children on this income. Try to pay for heat and electricity on this income.

We, as mothers, share the stress and pain of watching our children go without, trying to meet bills without money, caring for children without resources, leaving our children to take jobs. Each time a child is lost to the dangers of poverty, we share the grief.

We, as women, as mothers, will no longer plead. We deserve decent lives and decent income for ourselves and our children. We demand that welfare grants be brought up to the poverty level and beyond.

The governor has shown his disregard for our lives. Now we are looking to the legislature to create a more humane policy. They must make welfare grants liveable NOW!!"

- Christina Roderick, Welfare recipient and CBHN member

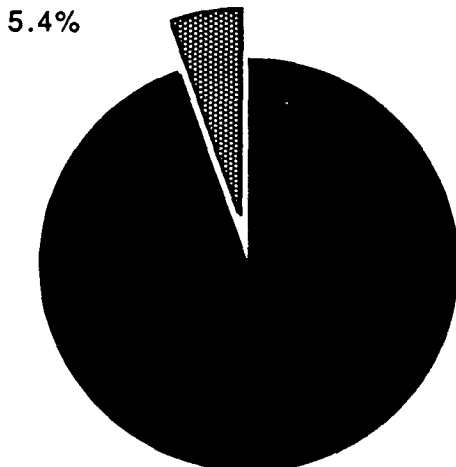
A BUDGET CRUNCH IS NOTHING NEW

The proposed 4% increase in welfare grants for FY 1990, if approved in the final budget, will be a major step backward for families and individuals who must rely on AFDC or GR to pay the rent and feed their families each month. After accounting for Food Stamps that are reduced when cash assistance is increased, and inflation during the past year, a family of three will lose \$39 each month in purchasing power. That will mean less food, or a heating bill unpaid, or in some cases eviction and perhaps homelessness. In order to simply maintain families' current purchasing power grants must be raised 14%.

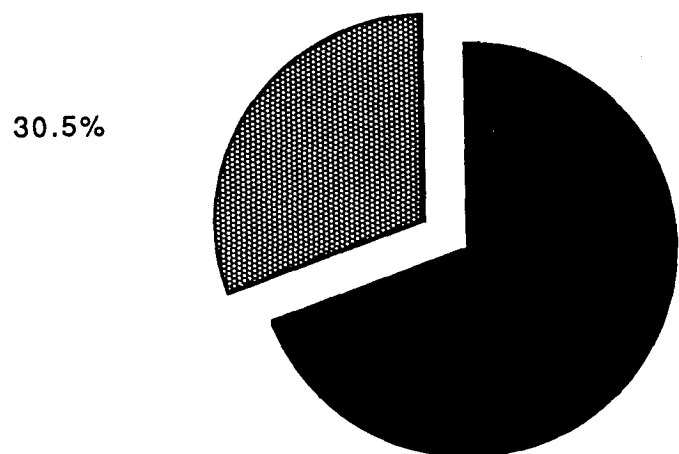
But we are told that Massachusetts can't afford to pay for grants that are up to and beyond the poverty level, or even 14% for that matter. **The state of Massachusetts is now facing what welfare recipients have faced for years: a budget deficit.** This year, there is not enough money in the current state budget to cover the costs of essential services. Welfare recipients deal with this situation every month. Every month, the welfare check is not enough to cover the costs of rent, food, and other essential expenses. Hopefully, legislators will now better understand how difficult it is to live on such inadequate grants, and will work to raise the grants above the poverty level.

Although the state is experiencing a budget crisis, it is not a permanent problem. There are ways to raise funds to pay for essential services, like adequate welfare grants, day care, affordable housing, and health care. Taxes are one way that income is redistributed in Massachusetts, from those who have more to those who have less. Certain kinds of revenues are more fair than others; that is, they place less of a burden on those who can't afford higher taxes and place a greater burden on those who can. Fair tax measures **must** be passed in the Legislature this year so that programs can continue to provide needed services. (Some of our ideas for fair tax measures that will raise revenues are described on page 15.) Raising welfare grants to adequate levels is possible; it only takes the will of the public and Legislature to raise revenues in a fair manner.

MASSACHUSETTS BUDGET DEFICIT



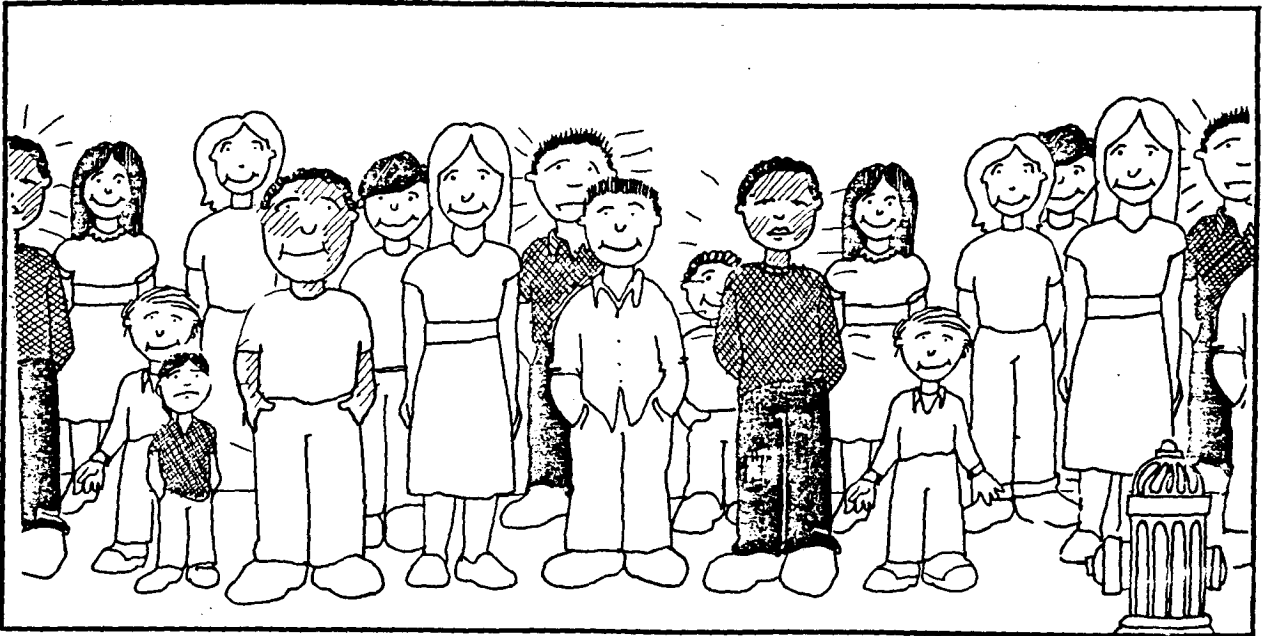
AFDC FAMILY DEFICIT



WHO RECEIVES WELFARE BENEFITS?

* One out of every four children born in Massachusetts this year will receive AFDC benefits before their first birthday.

* During 1989 nearly 400,000 people in Massachusetts will receive AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) or GR (General Relief) benefits.



* Of the 400,000, nearly 250,000 are kids, and over 125,000 are their mothers.

* Those receiving public assistance who are not children or parents are individuals who are disabled.

WHAT DO WELFARE RECIPIENTS NEED? WHAT'S THE GAP?

The Up and Out of Poverty Campaign is working to raise benefits to a level that provides for the basic needs of a family: food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities. Currently, welfare benefits are only \$539 a month. How high do the benefits need to be?

\$13,000 for a family of three.

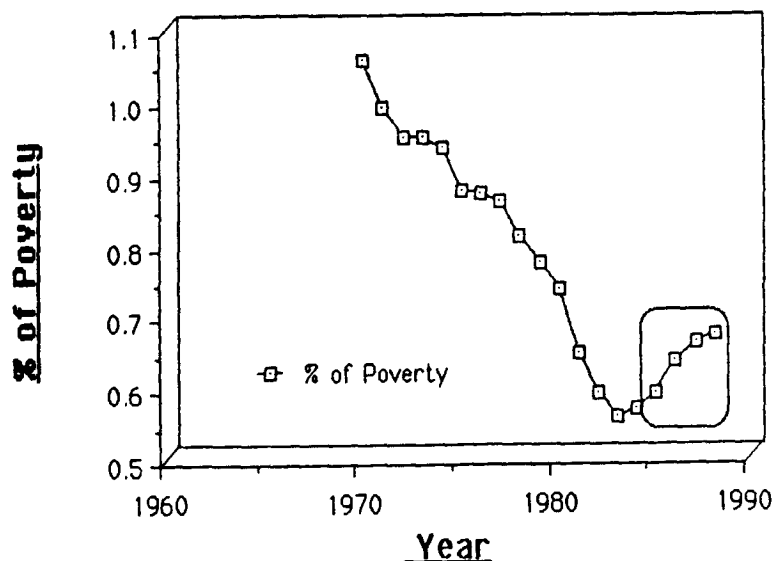
This is the minimum level that organizations working on the Campaign have determined is necessary to meet these basic needs. The bill that is in the Legislature right now calls for raising welfare benefits to the poverty level with a \$250 monthly rent supplement for families in private housing. The bill will thus bring benefits up to the needed levels.

A March 1989 study by the state determined that a family of three in private housing needs \$12,500 yearly, while families in public or subsidized families need \$9,950. The Up and Out of Poverty Campaign believes that its bill calling for \$13,000 is a more realistic assessment of the amount of income that is needed for survival. Basic AFDC benefits are currently half of this level, while General Relief benefits are even less!

What has happened to grants last year?

In January 1988 Governor Dukakis proposed a 5.5% increase in AFDC and GR benefits. The legislature adopted this proposal in June when it enacted the budget for the current fiscal year. This 5.5% increase is far below what families who receive welfare need to provide for their children. In fact, after a deduction in food stamps is taken into account, this will only be less than a 3% increase in real income. Inflation for low-income families was over 6.5% during the past year. So the 5.5% increase broadened, rather than closed the gap between current benefits and adequate grant levels.

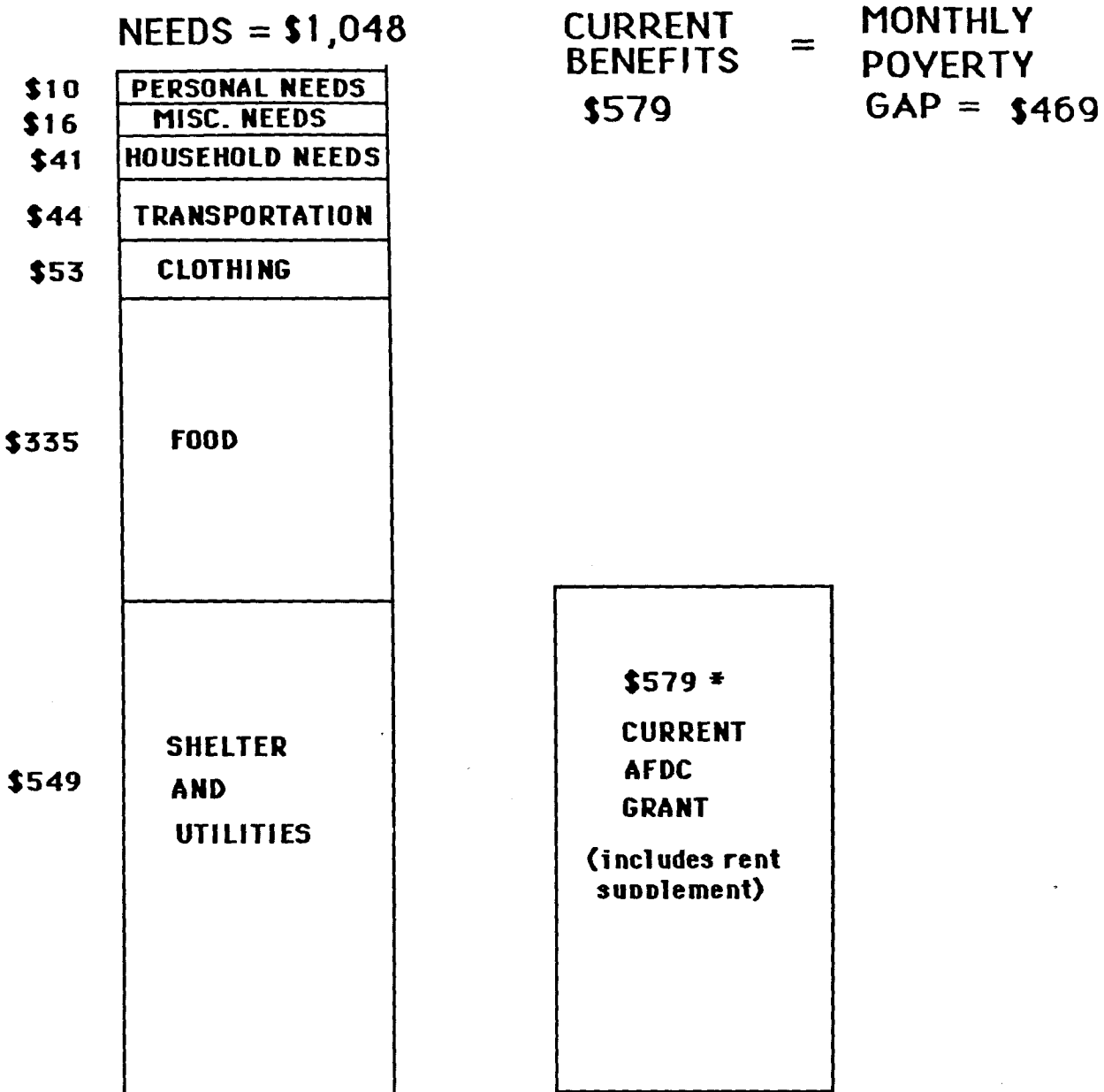
The chart below shows how grants have changed as a percentage of the federal poverty line:



Here's what the gap looks like...

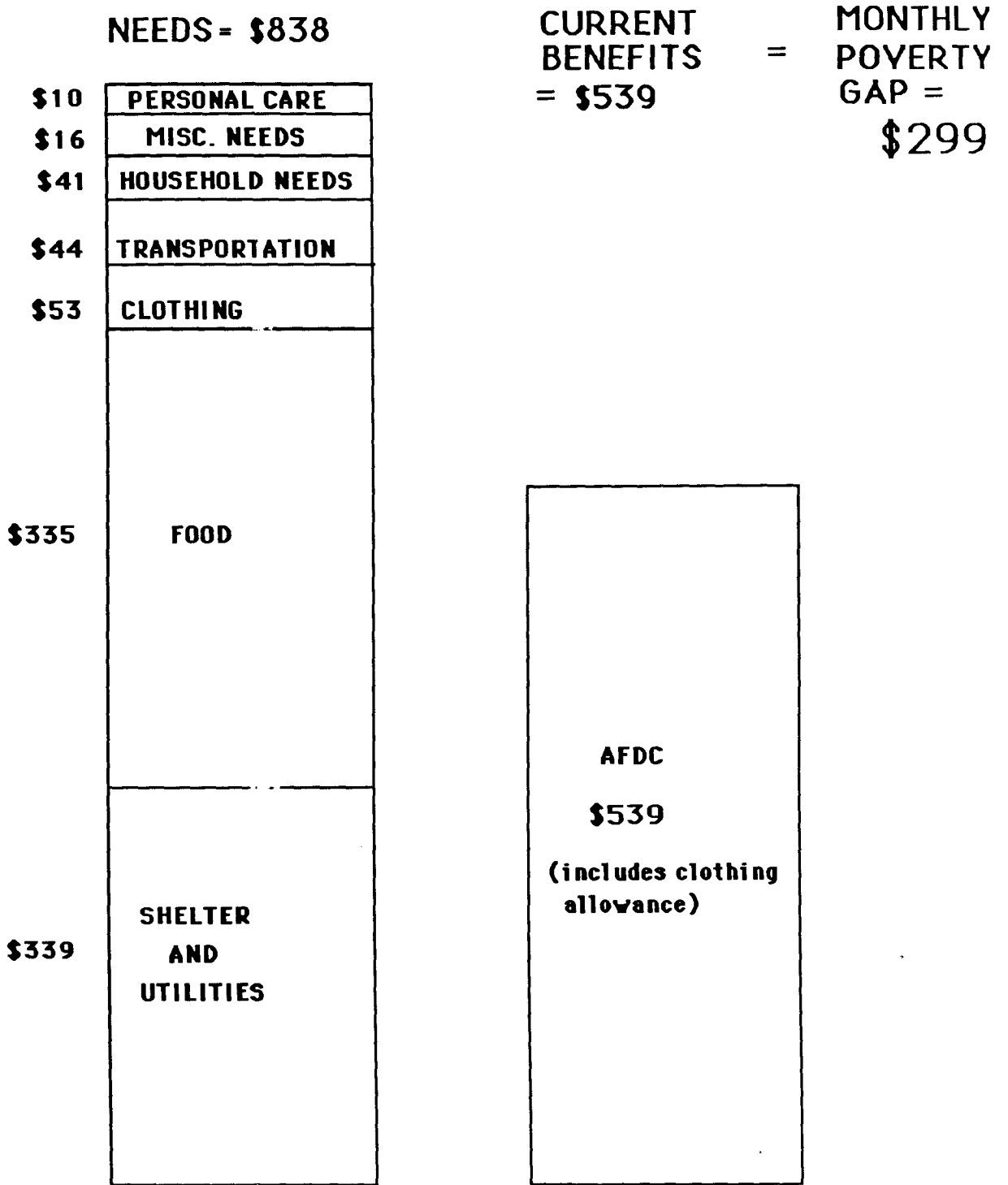
WHAT DO PEOPLE NEED AND WHAT DO THEY GET?

FAMILY OF THREE IN PRIVATE HOUSING MONTHLY BUDGET



* Although most families currently receive food stamps worth about \$1750 per year, families would be ineligible for food stamps if grants were high enough to meet basic needs. Therefore, food stamp benefits are not included in current benefit package.

FAMILY OF THREE IN PUBLIC OR SUBSIDIZED HOUSING MONTHLY BUDGET



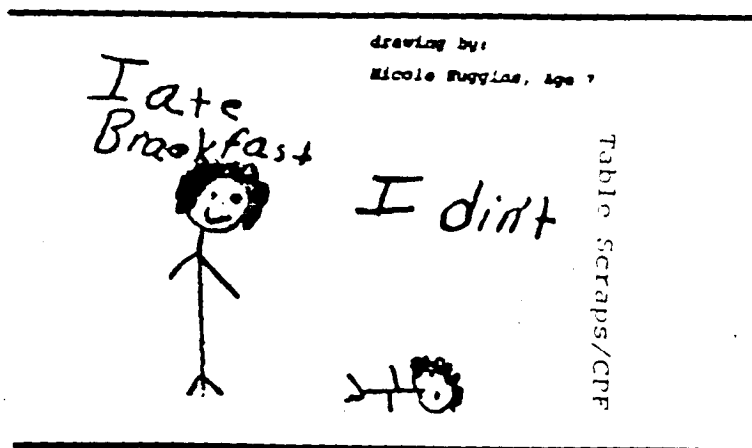
* Although most families in public or subsidized housing currently get about \$1275 per year in food stamp benefits, families receiving yearly AFDC grants of \$9,700 would only be eligible for \$250 per year in food stamp benefits. Therefore, food stamp benefits are not included in the current benefit package.

WHAT'S THE EFFECT ON FAMILIES?

Families who receive welfare are having to do without: without food, without shelter, and without money to pay for basic needs.

HUNGER

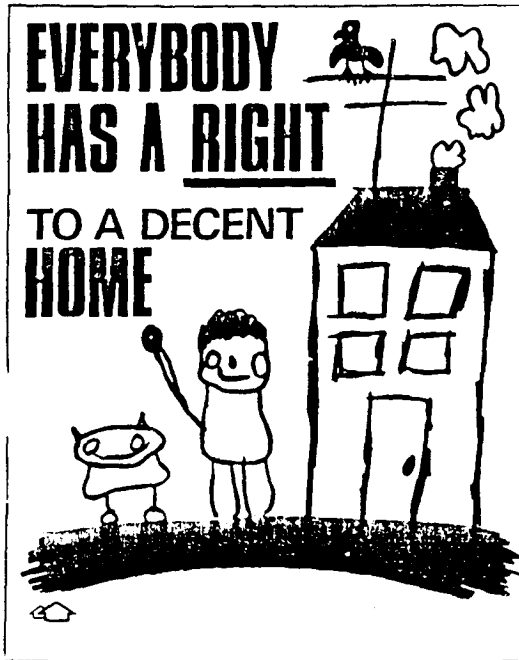
- * Over 84,000 people a month receive emergency groceries at food pantries in Massachusetts.
- * 45% of pantry providers said that inadequate public benefits were a main reason for hunger in their community.
- * 90% of these providers reported serving families with children.



HOMELESSNESS

- * Over 1,000 families are homeless each month in Massachusetts. They live either in shelters, motels, or on the streets. Many more are "doubled up" with friends and relatives, causing crowded living conditions.
- * 80% of these homeless families receive AFDC as their only source of income.
- * The Department of Public Welfare predicts that between July 1988 and June 1989, 5,700 AFDC families will become homeless, the vast majority simply because they cannot afford to pay rent.

- * Homelessness in Massachusetts is increasing at a rate of 30% per year.
- * There are 5 to 15 year waits for subsidized housing in many areas of the state.



L.T.U./CPV

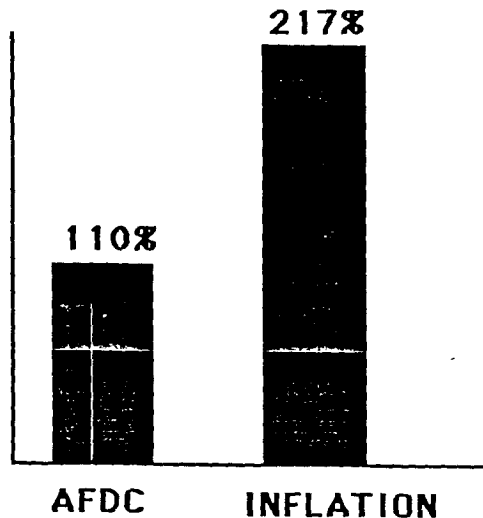
HEALTH

- * The infant mortality rate in Massachusetts is higher than in some third world countries.
- * In 1987, the infant mortality rate for the state was 7.2. The IMR for blacks throughout the state rose from 14.7 in 1984 to 15.5 in 1987. In Boston during 1986, the IMR for all residents was 13.9.
- * The Massachusetts Department of Public Health says, "Poor children are more likely to die than other children...The more prevalent health problems among poor children include: lead poisoning, anemia, infectious conditions, hearing and vision problems, asthma, injuries, speech disorders, learning disabilities, developmental delay, and mental retardation."

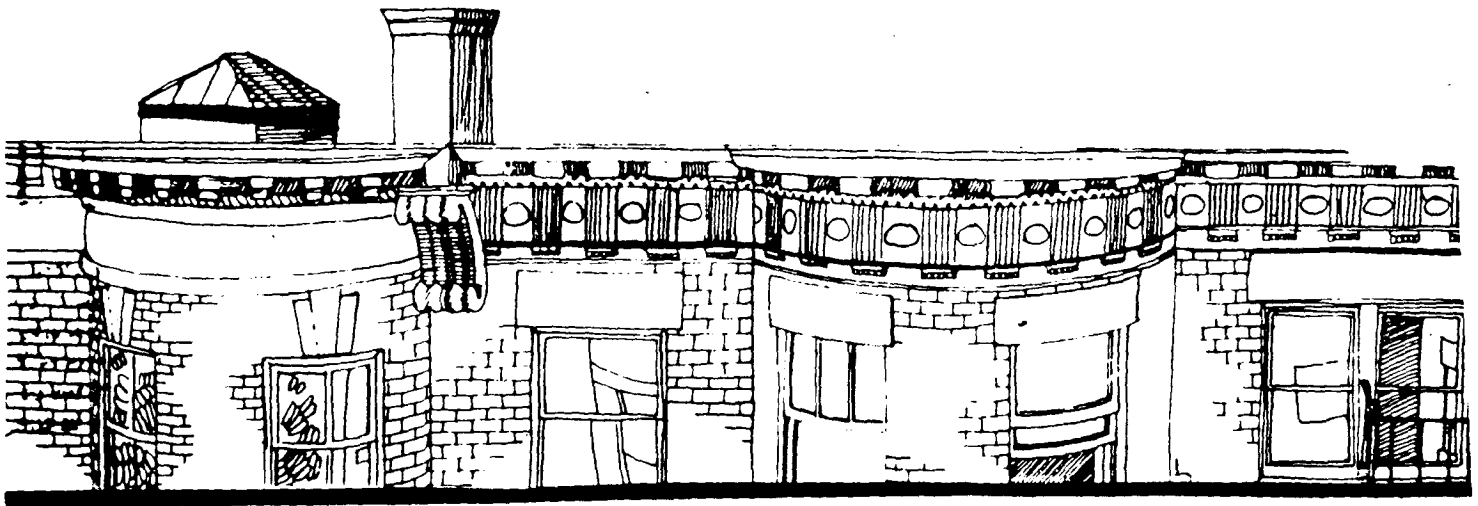


WERE THINGS ALWAYS THIS BAD?

No, they weren't. In 1970 welfare benefits were at the federal poverty line. However, in the past 17 years welfare benefits have not risen as fast as inflation. While welfare benefits rose 110% from 1970-1988, inflation rose by 217% -- about double the grant!



A second reason for the gap between what people need and what they receive is related to housing. In 1970 housing in Massachusetts was pretty affordable, with families paying only 1/4-1/3 of their income for rent. In the 1980s, the cost of housing has risen sharply. Today welfare benefits do not cover the high cost of housing, and many families are becoming homeless as a result. Average rents in cities in Massachusetts for a two-bedroom apartment are over \$500 -- the same amount as the entire AFDC grant for one month for a family of three.



WHY DO WE NEED HIGHER AFDC BENEFITS?

IT'S GOOD SENSE AND GOOD POLICY!

Raising welfare benefits makes economic sense.

Welfare recipients do not spend money investing in the stock market or buying luxury items from foreign countries. Their money goes toward paying the rent, and buying food, clothing, and other household necessities. This means that welfare recipients are investing in the local economy and promoting growth. An increase in welfare benefits will therefore help local economies grow.

Parents who receive welfare benefits already hold a number of jobs.

Consider the following jobs: accountant, judge, manager, nutritionist, organizer, day care provider, healer, and repair person. Parents who are raising their children perform all of these jobs at home, and many more. It is time to recognize the efforts of welfare parents at home as **work**, and as an investment in our children.



Many of today's working mothers are part of two-parent families or work part-time.

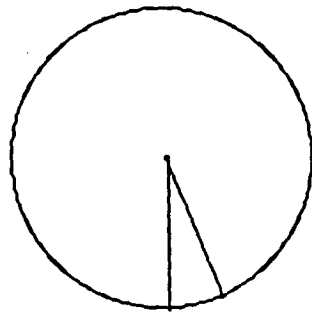
Many people have asked the question, "If so many women with children are able to go out and work, why shouldn't women who receive welfare do the same?" What is not always noticed is that many women who have children and work are members of families where both parents work and therefore have a larger income. They can then afford to pay for day care, transportation, and other work-related expenses. Women who are raising their children without the financial support of another adult have a much more difficult time finding a job that pays enough to cover these expenses, and must often rely upon welfare benefits to support the family during the child's growing years.

In fact, there are few women in two-parent families who work full-time. Only 23% of mothers of preschool children with a father present work full time. This is further proof of the difficulties parents face trying to raise children, and of the importance of adequate grants to enable women to do so alone.

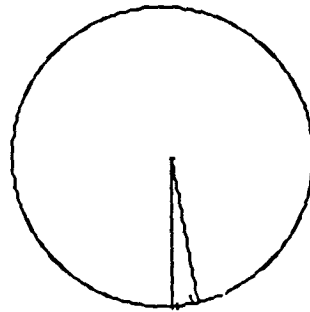
It doesn't cost that much to invest in our children.

Despite popular ideas, the AFDC and GR programs are not a large percentage of the total state or federal budget.

PERCENTAGE OF BUDGETS USED FOR WELFARE

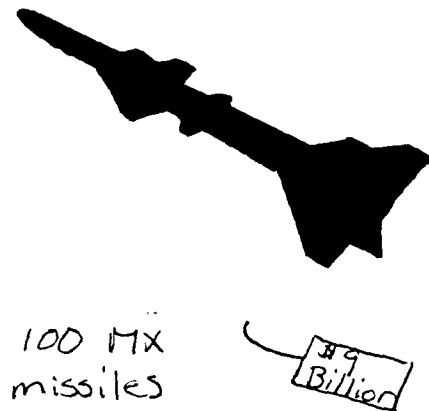
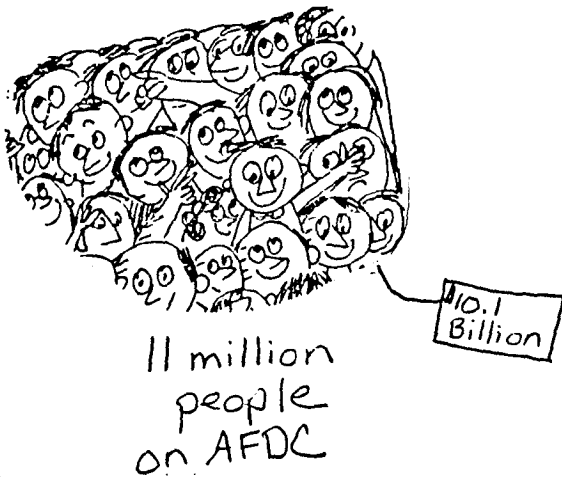


STATE = 6.1%



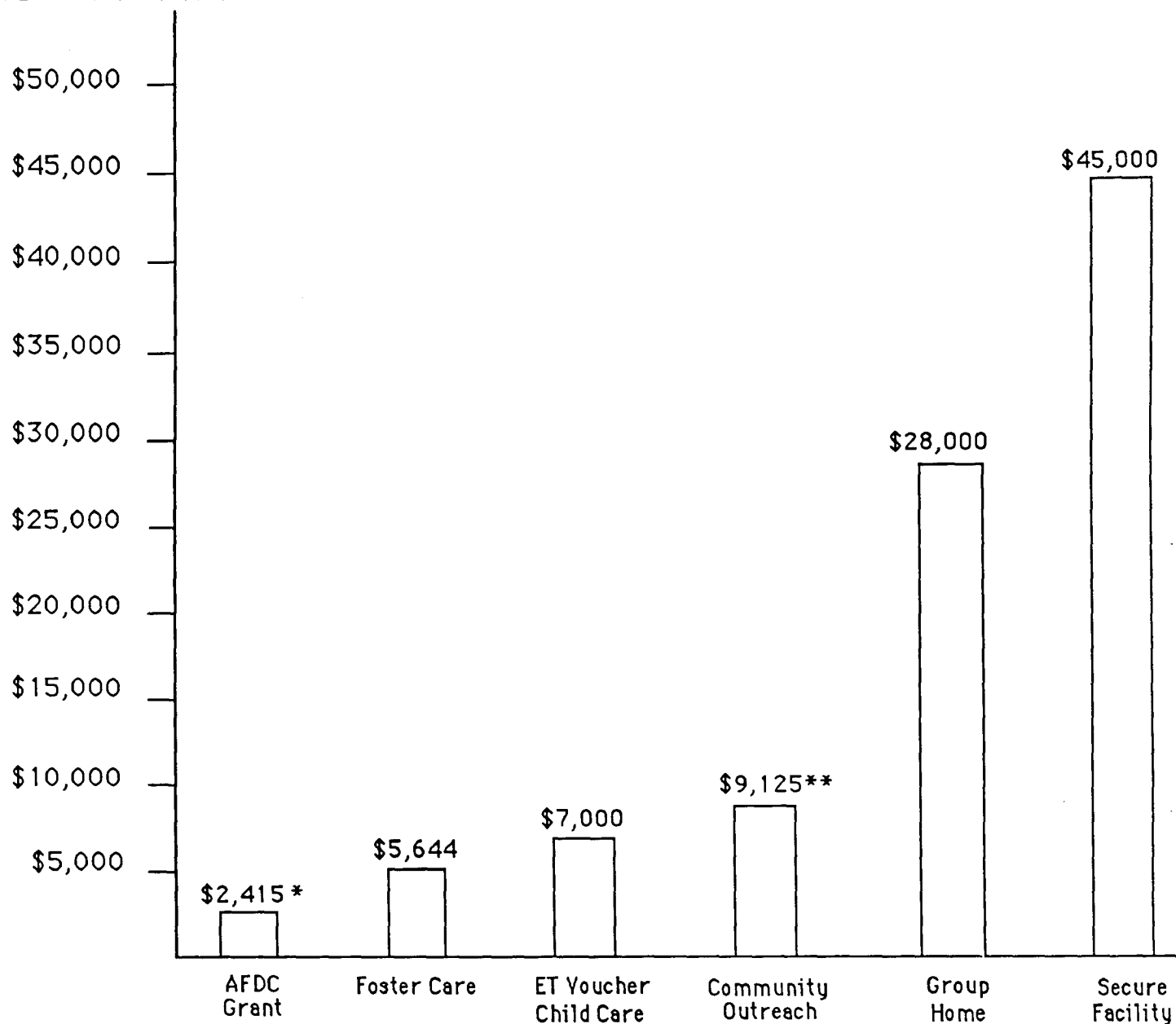
FEDERAL = 3%

When compared with the cost of a nuclear submarine, investing in families is very affordable and is better policy!



HOW MUCH DO WE SPEND PER CHILD IN OTHER PROGRAMS?

COST IN DOLLARS
PER CHILD/PER YEAR



GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN

* One-third of AFDC grant for a family of three.

** Intensive social services for troubled youth.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

To raise benefits to the poverty level for the current families who receive welfare and to provide a \$3,000 annual rent supplement for families in private housing, the state cost will be approximately **\$200 million dollars**. This would bring benefits up to the levels the state administration has said are necessary to meet basic needs.

WHERE WILL THE MONEY COME FROM?

The money to pay for this increase could come by closing any one of a number of tax loopholes. For example:

TAX BREAK

Exemption of services from the sales tax (focusing on limited personal services, and business services such as legal, accounting, architectural, computer programming, etc.)

LOST REVENUE

\$300 million

Deduction for capital gains, such as stock transactions and other money transactions.

\$275 million

Investment tax credit for purchases made by some corporations.

\$23 million

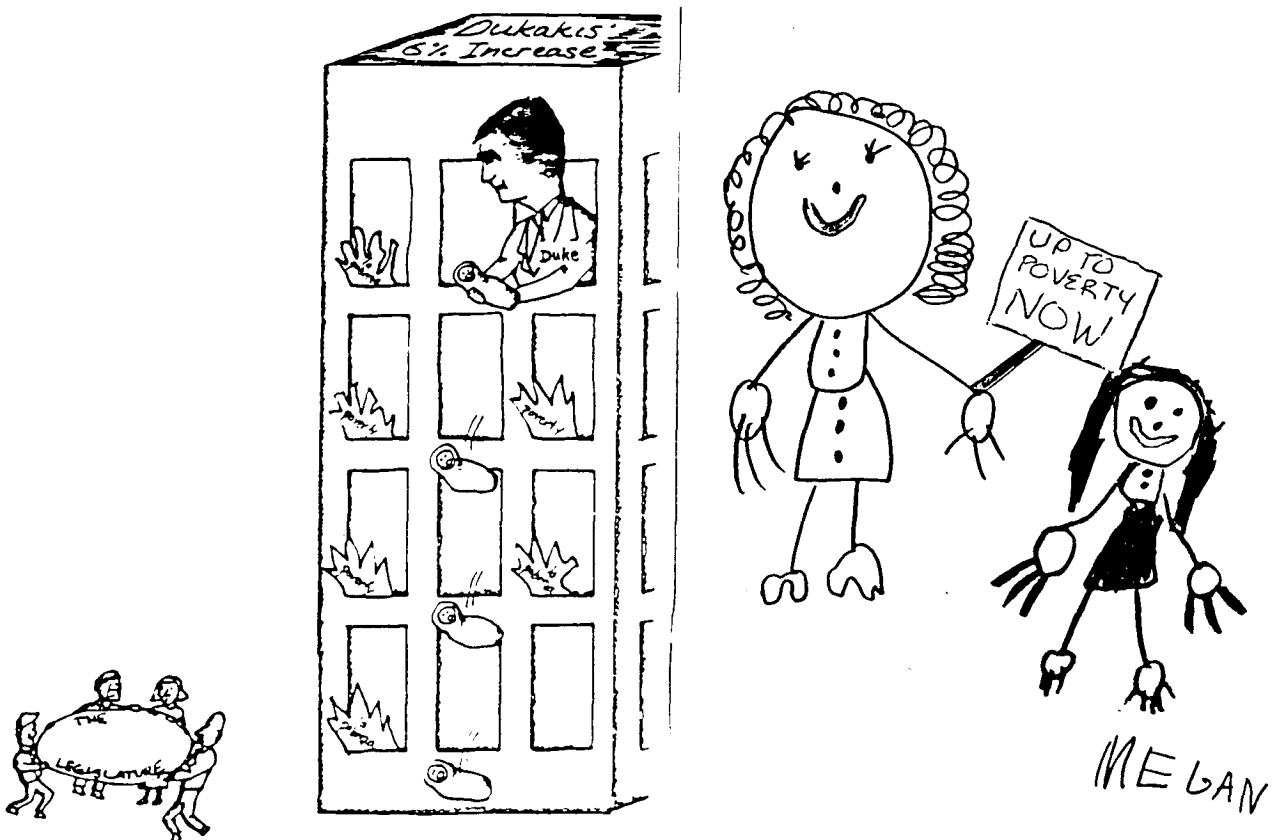
HISTORY UP AND OUT OF POVERTY CAMPAIGN

In 1984, a group of welfare recipients and activist organizations met to talk about the low welfare benefits in Massachusetts. In 1970, welfare benefits were at the poverty level. However, because of inflation and low increases in the grant, welfare benefits had fallen far below the poverty level by 1984. The group decided to start the "Up to Poverty and Beyond" Campaign to raise welfare benefits back to the poverty level in Massachusetts, and filed a bill in the legislature to raise benefits to the federal poverty line.

The first year of the Campaign focused on building a broad base of support for the issue across the state. Over 40 organizations endorsed the campaign and pledged to help with the activities of the campaign. The Campaign held rallies, spoke to community groups and the media, and met with state legislators. The media focused a great deal of attention on the Campaign, helping to educate the public about the need to raise benefits.

At the State House, the Campaign was successful in winning a 9% increase in the AFDC and GR grants -- more than twice the previous year's increase, but far below the needed amount. The Women's Legislative Caucus picked "Up to Poverty" as its single priority issue, and worked hard to get a 25% increase in the grant.

In the second and third years of the Campaign, outreach, education, and State House activities continued. Several major actions at the State House brought widespread media coverage, including: a Thanksgiving feast contrasting the table of a welfare recipient and of a rich family, a sleep-over at the State House by homeless families, and a mock funeral to show the relationship between low grants and the infant mortality rate. Meanwhile, public hearings on welfare were held in key senatorial districts to give welfare recipients the chance to speak directly with legislators. The Campaign won a total of 17% in increases, and a \$40 monthly rent supplement for families who live in private housing.



In the third year of the Campaign, late in the fall of 1986, the bill was changed to reflect the high cost of housing in Massachusetts. The new bill calls for increasing all benefits to the poverty line and adds a \$250 monthly rent supplement for families in private housing. This change came about partly as a result of a court case against the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In December of 1985, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and the Coalition for Basic Human Needs sued the governor and other administration officials claiming that a provision of state law required that AFDC grants be adequate to allow parents to raise their children properly, in their own homes. As a result of various court orders, including an August, 1987 ruling by the Supreme Judicial Court (the highest court in Massachusetts), the Administration has been forced to admit that families on AFDC need anywhere from \$9,950 (for public/subsidized housing) to \$12,500 for families in private housing in high rent areas such as Boston and Cape Cod.

In 1988, year four of the Campaign, there were over 90 organizations supporting the Campaign. The major organizations leading the campaign are the Coalition for Basic Human Needs, the Mass. Coalition for the Homeless, Mass. Human Services Coalition, Mass. Law Reform Institute, the Women's Campaign for Social Justice, National Association of Social Workers (Mass. chapter), and the National Organization for Women (Mass. chapter). A full list of endorsers for the campaign is at the end of this booklet. The Campaign gained support inside the legislature as well. In January 1988, for the first time, the Human Services Committee led by Representative Paul Kollios and Senator John Houston proposed that assistance be raised up to the administration's Standard Budgets of Assistance, (\$9,400-\$11,700 per year, at that time.) In March, 1988, hundreds of welfare recipients and their supporters demonstrated outside the Statehouse, while inside, 20 people sat-in at the Governor's office insisting that he support increases to adequate levels. The 20 were arrested that day when they refused to leave the Statehouse. In February, 1989, those arrested were acquitted of all charges against them following a jury trial.

Unfortunately, because of substantial budget deficits in the spring of 1988, the legislature voted only the 5.5% grant increase that the Governor had initially proposed. After taking into account lost Food Stamps and increased public and subsidized housing rents that resulted from the grant increase, recipients received a real increase of only 1%-3%, well below the 6.8% inflation rate between July, 1987 and June, 1988.

Once again, in 1989, we are faced with another grossly inadequate proposal to raise welfare grants by only 4%! At a time when inflation is running at close to 8% on an annual basis, and after taking into account Food Stamps that will be lost, this proposal would represent an increase by less than one-fourth the amount necessary just to keep up with inflation!

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The Up and Out of Poverty Campaign needs the involvement of everyone to succeed. The strength of the Campaign lies in the number of people and organizations who are committed to raising welfare benefits to adequate levels. There are many different ways to contribute to the campaign. Here are just a few:

Share this booklet with a friend: Talk with people you know about the Up and Out of Poverty Campaign. Education is one of the most important parts of this campaign!

Call or write to Governor Dukakis: Urge him to propose an adequate increase in welfare grants, enough to raise people up and out of poverty! Ask five friends to do the same!

Call your representative and senator: A brief call to your legislator at the State House to ask him/her to support raising welfare benefits up and out of poverty will help in gaining his/her vote. Ask five friends to do the same!

Write a letter or postcard: This is another effective way to let your legislator know how important this issue is. You can also organize a post card campaign with your friends or an organization you are involved with. It doesn't take much time and it is very effective!

Join the Campaign! Call one of the groups listed on the first page of this booklet to find out how to become more involved.

Organize a few friends: Get some friends together to work on the issue in your area. Talk with organizations in your community to get their support. Call one of the endorsing organizations for help in organizing a group.



ENDORSERS OF "UP TO POVERTY" BILL

November, 1988

Advocacy for Resources for Modern Survival
Alliance for Economic Justice
Alliance for Young Families
Americans for Democratic Action
American Friends Service Committee, N.E. Regional Office
A.R.I.S.E.
B'nai B'rith Council of Greater Boston
Boston Children's Service Association
Boston Indian Council
Boston N.O.W.
Boston Women's Health Book Collective
Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women
Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee
Cambridge Family and Children's Service
Cambridge Y.W.C.A.
Capital Area Council for Children
Casa Latina, Inc., Northampton
Chicopee Emergency Food and Fuel (CHIEFF)
City Mission Society
Coalition for A Better Acre
Coalition for Basic Human Needs
Community Change, Inc.
Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, Board of Directors
C.P.P.A.X.
Democratic Socialists of America
Educational Opportunity Center, New Bedford
Everywoman's Center
Family Service of Greater Boston
Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Houses, Inc.
Franklin Community Action Corp.
Gay Community News
Gray Panthers of Greater Boston
Hampshire College Feminist Studies Program
Harriet Tubman House, United South End Settlements
Harvard Square Churches Meal Program
Haymarket People's Fund
Jewish Community Relations Council
League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
Lynn Economic Opportunity, Inc.
Massachusetts Advocacy Center
Massachusetts Anti-Hunger Coalition
Massachusetts Association of Community Development
Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, Inc.
Massachusetts Coalition of Pregnant and Parenting Teens
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Massachusetts Community Action Association
Massachusetts Council of Churches
Massachusetts Human Services Coalition
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Massachusetts N.O.W.
Mass. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Massachusetts Tenants Organization
Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus
Mayor's Hunger Commission - Boston
Metropolitan Council for Educational Development
Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc.
National Association of Social Workers
Necessities/Necesidades
New Bedford Area Center for Human Services, Inc.
New Bedford Women's Center
New England Women's Studies Association
9 to 5 Organization for Women Office Workers
Northampton CSA Advisory Board, Department of Public Welfare
North Central Council for Children
North Shore Community Action Programs
Office for Children Statewide Advisory Council
Old Cambridge Baptist Church
People MEET, Inc.
Pine-James Organized Forces
Poor and Oppressed Women's Educational Resources
Poor People's United Fund
Project Bread Hunger Hotline
Project Care and Concern
Rainbow Coalition
Reproductive Rights National Network
Renewal House
Respond, Inc.
Roxbury Multi-Service Center
S.E.I.U., Local 285
Sisters of St. Joseph - Office of Justice & Peace
Sojourn, Northampton
South Middlesex Opportunity Council
Synagogue Council of Massachusetts
Transition House
Tri-City Welfare Rights Organization, Inc.
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United South End Settlements
Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.
Women for Economic Justice
Women in Crisis Committee, Episcopal Diocese of Mass.
Women of Colors Unified
Women's Alliance, Framingham
Women's Campaign for Social Justice
Women's Issues Network
Women's Theological Center



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