



Following publication of a recent article about the workings of the welfare system, there was some response in the Letters to the Editor column. In addition, I received personally from a welfare mother a letter I'd like to share with you.

To make certain I wouldn't harm this lady, I requested her permission to quote her, give her side of the story and let people judge for themselves. Now, with her permission, see how it seems to her:

"I'm writing to thank you for your article in the September 11, 1975 issue of the Village Advertiser. It is obvious you have your facts and figures correct.

"As a welfare mother of two children, ages 6 and 7, I think it's important the public be informed that when you work, you lose a certain percentage of your welfare benefits."

She then tells me she is employed and where, but asks I keep this information confidential, since it might narrow it down so she could be recognized. I have, of course, agreed.

"My starting salary was \$2.46 per hour when I began work last fall. I also had a rent subsidy from the Barnstable Housing Authority. When I went to work my welfare check was cut \$97.00 per month, right off the top. Then my rent was increased by \$26.00 per month and my food stamps purchase price upped by \$16.

"All this because I chose to get off my duff and try to renew my pride and self-respect. And I am not even able to work a full forty-hour week!

"After really dealing truthfully and fairly with welfare for over two years, I conclude the only way to get ahead is to cheat.

"It seems unfortunate, indeed, that the way the present welfare system is set up, it encourages cheating.

"Please let me know how those of us in this position can change some of these injustices and inequities."

Facing this question, I can give no answer; an answer there must be, but I don't know what it is. I do know it's imperative an answer be found. When "the system" makes cheats of honest people, gives with one hand and takes away with the other, is punitive towards those who help themselves and try to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, something is dreadfully wrong.

And when "the system" grows at the rate of 20% a year, compounded, as it has nationwide over the past three years, the wrong is compounded at a terrifying rate. Welfare laws were made by our legislators, and changes can come only through legislation and only if we make our legislators aware of our desire for change.

There's little incentive to welfare mothers to find employment. When they do, they are little better off, financially, than if they stayed home. People with useable skills are wasting them, getting rusty, and becoming more and more discouraged.

One thing I asked this welfare mother was to encourage others like herself to write me about their circumstances, and tell me their experiences as working recipients of AFDC. When she responded to say I could publish her letter, she wrote she's unable to think of any. That is, she doesn't know any other **working** welfare mothers. It does not surprise me to hear this.

In her second letter she asked I also point out that none of us marries and has children with the thought that if everything doesn't work out, I can always go on welfare.

"It's a bitter pill to swallow to admit we picked as a mate a man who will not support his children, no matter what happens to his marriage," she said.

Please think about that. What happens when a young couple falls in love, marries, has children — and then the husband and father deserts his wife and children? What is she to do?

he can't leave the kids to work until they are school-age. If she too walks out on them, it will cost the taxpayers of the state several thousand dollars a year to care for each of the children.

That, of course, isn't the reason she continues to care for her kids. She loves them, for one thing, and for another, as a responsible person, she wants her kids to receive the best possible care. She feels (and she's right) she can do a better job, raising them, than a stranger.

She applies for Aid for Dependent Children, through the welfare department; not because she wants to be dependent, but because she has no choice except to let her babies starve. Under our law, she's entitled to help. She's entitled to food stamps so she can buy more food for less money than those of us fortunate enough not to need food stamps. She's entitled to money for rent, clothing, furniture, utilities. And she's entitled to a rent subsidy. That's the law.

Once the children are in school, she tries to help herself. When she finds a job her rent goes up, the cost of her food stamps increases, and a large percentage of her income is eliminated.

This is not "getting ahead"; this is taking one step forward and three steps back. Clearly, the way to get ahead, meet the ever-rising costs of living, and achieve financial progress is to collect full welfare payments, get the most food stamps for the least amount of money, remain eligible for a high rent subsidy, and work on the side without letting the welfare department find out.

This is, of course, fraud.

What would YOU do, in her shoes? Stay home and try to eke out an existence on your welfare check? A check that daily loses its elasticity and fails to stretch to meet spiralling and inflated prices?

Or would you be tempted to augment your income somehow?

I would. I'd be sorely tempted, just as she is tempted. At least she's got the gumption to try to help herself.

If there are others of you, out there somewhere, in the same boat, I wish you'd let me know. I'll respect your wishes to remain anonymous, but I'd like to quote your experiences.

I'd also like your permission to show your letter to Senator Aylmer and Representative Wilber, so they too may know how important it is to change "the system" so people can help themselves without taking a financial beating.

Address mail to P.O. Box 353, Osterville 02655. Please do it; it can help us all.