

WR - CITIES

**THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION CENTER ON URBAN AND METROPOLITAN POLICY  
STATE OF WELFARE CASELOADS IN AMERICA'S CITIES  
AN OVERVIEW<sup>1</sup>  
MAY 11, 1998**

**THE CONTEXT: WELFARE CASELOADS ARE DECLINING ACROSS THE COUNTRY**

Between January 1993 and September 1997, the nation's welfare caseloads declined by 30 percent. Some states experienced more dramatic declines during the same period.

While the volume of welfare cases is not an adequate measure of welfare reform's success, it is one indicator that political leaders and the public currently rely upon.

There is scarce information -- and insufficient debate -- on the nature of welfare caseloads in America's cities, where poverty is the most concentrated.

**THE STATE OF WELFARE CASELOADS IN AMERICA'S CITIES**

The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy conducted a study of welfare caseload declines in 23 major cities and urban counties. This is a small, random selection of cities that may not fully represent the experience of all urban communities. The study examined city/county and state welfare caseloads from 1986-1997.

There is no clear or simple trend that defines the overall experiences of the disparate cities studied. However, there are some major findings worth noting:

- ◆ ***Between 1994 and 1997, two-thirds of the cities did not reduce their welfare caseloads as fast their states.***

Bridgeport reduced its welfare caseload at a rate 70 percent slower than Connecticut's.

Los Angeles cut its welfare caseload at a rate 26 percent slower than California's.

- ◆ ***All of the cities that were slower in reducing their welfare caseloads became home to a larger share of the state's welfare caseload.***

Between 1994 and 1997, Milwaukee cut its welfare caseload at a pace nearly 30 percent slower than Wisconsin's. In that same time period, the city saw its share of the state's welfare caseload grow by 35 percent.

Between 1994 and 1997, Miami/Dade County cut its welfare caseload at a pace 22 percent slower than Florida's. In that same period, the county saw its share of the state's welfare caseload grow by 12 percent.

- ◆ ***In 1996, the year welfare reform was passed, nearly 80 percent of the cities studied had shares of the state's welfare population that were larger than the cities' share of the state's total population.***

Milwaukee County contained over half of Wisconsin's welfare caseloads. But the county only made up 18 percent of the state's general population.

Philadelphia contained 40 percent of Pennsylvania's welfare caseloads. But the city only made up 12 percent of the state's general population.

- ◆ ***The pace of a city's welfare caseload decline appears to closely correlate with the extent of poverty in that city.***

San Francisco cut its welfare caseloads at a pace nearly three times faster than the state's. The percentage of San Francisco residents living in areas of concentrated poverty is 1.6 percent.

St. Louis cut its welfare caseloads at a pace 40 percent slower than the state's. Over one quarter of the city's residents live in areas of concentrated poverty.<sup>2</sup>

#### **THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Nearly 70 percent of the cities surveyed did not perform as well as their states in moving recipients off the welfare payrolls. This figure is for the period of 1994 to 1997, when the nation was experiencing consecutive years of economic prosperity, and welfare reform was underway in many states as a result of federal waivers and, ultimately, enactment.

This study sounds a cautionary note, amidst the optimism surrounding caseload declines, that welfare reform may not be playing out evenly across the country. It is a signal that federal and state governments may need to pay special attention to the unique challenges of different jurisdictions and, more importantly, to cities and neighborhoods where poverty is the most concentrated.

1. See the full report, *The State of Welfare Caseloads in America's Cities*, by the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy for complete explanations of the figures in this document.

2. Concentrated poverty figures here are defined as the percentage of total city population living in distressed neighborhoods. Distressed neighborhoods are defined as "census tract that exhibits disproportionately high levels of poverty, joblessness, female-headed households, and welfare receipt."

**RELATIVE SPEED OF CASELOAD DECLINE IN  
SELECTED CITIES AND COUNTIES, 1994-1997<sup>15</sup>**

<b>SLOWER (<math>&lt;95\%</math> OF STATE)</b>		<b>SAME (<math>95-105\%</math> OF STATE)</b>		<b>FASTER (<math>&gt;105\%</math> OF STATE)</b>	
<i>Bridgeport</i>	28.0%	<i>Marion Co. (Indianapolis)</i>	103.4%	<i>Denver Co.</i>	108.4%
<i>Philadelphia Co.</i>	48.3%			<i>Allegheny Co. (Pittsburgh)</i>	128.9%
<i>St. Louis</i>	57.2%			<i>Mecklenberg Co. (Charlotte)</i>	142.5%
<i>Cuyahoga Co. (Cleveland)</i>	68.6%			<i>Maricopa Co. (Phoenix)*</i>	144.6%
<i>St. Louis Co.</i>	70.7%			<i>King Co. (Seattle)</i>	176.6%
<i>Milwaukee Co.</i>	72.2%			<i>Hartford</i>	195.1%
<i>Detroit*</i>	73.3%			<i>San Francisco Co.</i>	292.8%
<i>Los Angeles Co.</i>	73.9%				
<i>Dade Co. (Miami)</i>	78.3%				
<i>Wayne Co. (Detroit)</i>	81.0%				
<i>Cook Co. (Chicago)</i>	90.2%				
<i>New York City</i>	90.6%				
<i>Chicago</i>	93.2%				
<i>Boston</i>	94.0%				
<i>Suffolk Co. (Boston)</i>	94.4%				

\* Please note that caseload data for 1997 was unavailable for Maricopa County (Phoenix) and Detroit. However, these two jurisdictions have been included in the analysis using 1994-1996 data.

We also counted the total number of cities and counties with caseloads declining at a faster or slower rate than their respective states. Between 1986 and 1997, there was an even split between: a) cities where caseloads declined faster or increased more slowly than the state (47%); and b) cities whose caseloads declined

<sup>15</sup> "Relative speed" expresses the rate of city/county caseload decline as a percentage of the rate of state caseload decline.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**CITY, COUNTY, AND STATE ANNUAL CASELOAD CHANGE, 1986-1997**

City/State	% Annual Caseload Change											% Caseload Change Over Time		
	86-87	87-88	88-89	89-90	90-91	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	86-97	90-97	94-97
Boston			-0.7	1.9	9.8	3.5	3.9	-4.2	-11.5	-10.1	-12.0		-20.8	-29.9
Suffolk County			3.2	2.4	10.1	2.9	4.0	-3.9	-11.7	-9.7	-12.2		-20.8	-30.1
Massachusetts	1.4	0.2	6.9	4.7	11.5	3.5	3.6	-5.6	-13.0	-11.1	-11.8	-12.5	-23.1	-31.8
Bridgeport	-6.5	-9.6	1.1	6.8	15.5	4.2	2.8	-0.3	3.5	-1.0	-4.4	10.3	20.9	-2.1
Hartford	0.2	-1.0	5.5	2.6	12.5	4.3	1.0	-0.3	0.7	-5.6	-10.1	8.4	1.0	-14.6
Connecticut	-3.9	-3.9	1.0	12.0	18.9	6.0	3.6	3.1	4.2	-2.6	-8.8	30.2	24.6	-7.5
Charlotte/ Mecklenburg County			6.7	5.2	25.8	37.2	4.2	8.1	-8.7	-13.1	-12.4		35.2	-30.4
North Carolina	1.9	2.1	10.1	9.9	19.9	18.4	9.1	2.0	-2.9	-9.1	-10.9	56.4	24.2	-21.4
Chicago	-2.1	-6.4	-6.3	0.7	4.2	0.5	2.3	3.3	-2.5	-3.7	-13.2	-22.1	-9.9	-18.6
Cook County	-2.1	-6.6	-6.0	0.9	5.0	1.8	3.1	4.4	-2.3	-3.0	-13.5	-18.1	-5.6	-18.0
Illinois	-1.2	-6.5	-5.7	2.2	6.4	1.9	2.8	4.2	-3.0	-4.4	-13.7	-17.1	-7.0	-19.9
Cleveland/ Cuyahoga County					3.6	8.1	0.2	-1.4	-6.6	-6.0	-8.7	-12.2	-11.2	-19.7
Ohio	-0.5	-0.6	-1.3	2.6	8.4	5.4	-1.5	-3.9	-10.1	-8.4	-13.5	-22.9	-22.9	-28.8
Denver					9.2	14.4	5.3	0.2	-6.1	-9.2	-13.3	9.4	-2.6	-26.1

City/State	% Annual Caseload Change											% Caseload Change Over Time		
	86-87	87-88	88-89	89-90	90-91	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	86-97	90-97	94-97
Colorado					8.4	9.5	2.9	-1.0	-6.0	-8.3	-11.9	17.3	-8.3	-24.1
Detroit	2.0	-2.0	0.0	5.6	-1.2	0.3	1.9	-1.3	-6.7	-9.0				
Wayne County	2.9	-1.9	0.0	2.1	3.3	0.5	2.3	-1.0	-6.6	-10.0	-12.2	-20.1	-22.4	-26.2
Michigan	13.5	-0.6	-0.8	3.2	4.3	-0.9	1.8	-2.5	-10.0	-11.8	-14.8	-19.8	-30.6	-32.3
Indianapolis/ Marion County	-8.4	0.0	0.0	10.2	14.8	16.9	2.1	4.2	-4.2	-23.8	-12.8	-8.3	-9.1	-36.3
Indiana	-5.2	-0.7	-2.3	2.3	9.8	11.9	4.9	3.7	-6.0	-19.7	-14.0	-18.4	-13.3	-35.1
Los Angeles County	1.8	-4.7	-4.2	5.5	13.8	14.7	7.9	6.8	2.2	-1.5	-5.2	40.7	43.5	-4.6
San Francisco County	-2.6	-3.3	-2.1	3.2	5.8	2.5	2.5	2.4	-2.3	-5.1	-11.7	-11.3	-6.8	-18.2
California	3.7	0.7	2.3	6.3	11.0	11.9	6.8	6.4	2.5	-2.0	-6.7	50.3	32.4	-6.2
Miami/ Dade County					16.7	30.4	13.3	0.5	-5.4	-8.2	-17.1		24.7	-28.0
Florida	7.7	5.6	9.0	15.4	25.1	33.6	8.1	-3.9	-7.7	-9.5	-23.1	59.3	11.4	-35.8
Milwaukee/ Milwaukee County	-0.7	-3.5	-3.6	0.2	3.5	1.8	-0.1	-1.0	-2.5	-14.0	-28.5	-42.2	-37.6	-40.1
Wisconsin	-3.5	-8.0	-7.5	-1.8	2.3	0.3	-2.1	-4.2	-7.4	-22.2	-38.4	-65.6	-57.3	-55.6
New York City	-3.3	-3.3	-1.7	1.9	7.1	6.4	11.3	6.2	0.0	-6.1	-11.9	4.3	11.4	-17.2
New York	-4.0	-3.5	-0.5	3.8	8.4	6.1	9.3	4.2	-1.6	-6.4	-12.0	1.6	6.2	-19.0

City/State	% Annual-Caseload-Change											% Caseload-Change Over Time		
	86-87	87-88	88-89	89-90	90-91	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	86-97	90-97	94-97
<b>Philadelphia/ Philadelphia County</b>		-3.7	-2.6	0.4	6.6	5.9	4.3	3.6	2.1	-3.9	-6.7		11.6	-8.5
<b>Pittsburgh/ Allegheny County</b>		-3.1	-2.6	-2.2	2.2	2.4	0.8	0.5	-2.0	-9.8	-12.6		-18.2	-22.8
<b>Pennsylvania</b>		-4.0	-2.9	0.1	6.4	6.4	2.8	2.3	-0.6	-6.8	-11.2		-2.0	-17.7
<b>Phoenix/ Maricopa County</b>		10.9	15.8	21.4	22.9	23.9	15.1	5.4	-2.6	-12.3				
<b>Arizona</b>		9.1	11.8	17.3	20.6	21.2	12.6	4.6	-1.2	-9.0				
<b>Saint Louis</b>	-1.2	-0.3	-0.3	1.2	4.3	7.0	1.1	2.3	-0.5	-3.3	-7.0	2.4	3.2	-10.6
<b>Saint Louis County</b>	-1.9	4.4	3.7	5.4	11.1	18.6	11.0	8.2	-1.1	-5.0	-7.5	53.9	37.4	-13.1
<b>Missouri</b>	1.2	0.7	0.5	3.1	6.4	12.6	5.7	4.0	-3.0	-5.7	-10.9	13.3	7.3	-18.6
<b>Seattle/King County</b>	5.1	1.1	4.3	6.0	7.1	11.5	8.6	5.7	0.8	-3.6	-7.5	44.7	23.1	-10.2
<b>Washington</b>	8.4	0.5	2.8	4.0	6.8	16.3	0.4	2.4	-0.1	-3.2	-2.6	40.1	20.3	-5.8