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WR vouchers

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Subject: Here's the AP story on welfare to work 

WASHINGTON (AP) President Clinton's upcoming budget will seek \$1.3 billion over five years to help welfare recipients live where the jobs are, administration officials said Wednesday. At the same time, officials released figures showing the welfare rolls below 10 million families for the first time since 1971.

The housing money is part of a modest set of welfare proposals Clinton will present to Congress next month. The president also wants to restore legal immigrants' food stamp benefits that were cut in the 1996 welfare overhaul law, and he has proposed spending \$100 million per year to help welfare recipients travel to jobs.

The housing money is meant to help people on welfare or those who recently left the rolls find affordable housing that is closer to jobs. About two-thirds of the new jobs are being created in the suburbs, but three-quarters of welfare recipients live in cities or rural areas.

"It rewards men and women who are willing to work hard to climb out of poverty under their own power," Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Andrew Cuomo said in a statement.

Under the five-year plan, communities would compete for 50,000 housing vouchers each year. People on welfare or those who have left the rolls in the last year could use the vouchers to move across town or to another city or state, as long as housing assistance is essential to getting or keeping a job.

Clinton will ask for \$283 million for the next fiscal year, with about \$300 million in each of the next four years. Using a voucher, a family would pay a maximum of 30 percent of its income for housing it finds on its own; the government would pick up the rest.

HUD already provides about 1.4 million housing vouchers to low-income Americans, including about 446,000 families receiving welfare checks.

Clinton also plans to ask Congress to spend about \$2 billion over five years to restore food stamps for legal immigrants, said an administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity. The 1996 welfare overhaul cut a variety of benefits for poor non-citizens, but Clinton won a budget fight last year to restore most of them, including disability benefits for elderly and sick immigrants.

The official would not say whether the proposal will cover all legal immigrants who lost benefits, or just those who were in the country when the welfare law was signed last year. The proposal also may cover only the neediest groups, such as children, the

disabled or the elderly.

Congressional Republicans have argued that providing such benefits to immigrants only encourages people to enter the country when they cannot afford to support themselves. They contend the people who sponsor their entry into the country, not the government, are responsible for the immigrants' well-being.

The transportation funding, \$600 million over six years, is part of a larger transportation bill that has stalled over other issues. Both the House and Senate have included a version of the program in their bills.

Separately Wednesday, administration officials released data showing the welfare rolls continued to shrink through August 1997.

Clinton plans to highlight the drop in his State of the Union speech Tuesday.

The rolls peaked in January 1994, with 14.3 million recipients. By August, they had fallen 30 percent to just under 10 million families. It was the first time the rolls dipped below 10 million since February 1971.

The largest drop was recorded in Wyoming, where the caseload has fallen 77 percent since 1993. Nine other states saw the number of cases cut by at least half: Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

Hawaii was the only state along with Guam and the Virgin Islands to see an increasing number of cases, with the rolls up 37 percent since 1993.

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