

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

March 16, 2010

Mr. Russell Sykes
Deputy Commissioner
New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
40 North Pearl Street
Albany, New York 12243

Dear Mr. Sykes:

Thank you for your March 11th testimony to the Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support at its hearing on TANF's role in providing assistance to struggling families. In order to complete our hearing record, I would appreciate your response to the following questions:

1. Peter Edelman, who also testified at the hearing, wrote in a December 2009 [article](#) that *“Welfare reform also provided the states with nearly complete discretion over how to administer benefits. Most states responded with gusto, reducing welfare rolls nationally by two-thirds in just a few years. So when the Great Recession came along, the government safety net for families with children was in tatters. The United States was no more prepared for massive unemployment than New Orleans had been prepared for its levees to fail...In the rapidly expanding service economy of the 1990s, many former welfare recipients did find jobs, but most did not escape poverty, and a significant number were pushed off the rolls without finding work.”*
 - a. Is that how you see things? Did States “push” welfare recipients off the rolls, or otherwise keep people from collecting welfare checks they should have gotten?
 - b. Or did States continue to make receipt of welfare benefits conditional on an individual's participation in work, education or other productive activities, consistent with the Federal law President Clinton signed in 1996?
2. Who decides what the size of the welfare rolls will be, in your view? Is it generally States, as Mr. Edelman has suggested, or individual low-income adults, who make rational decisions about participation in TANF given its work requirements and other rules?


3. Last summer New York State used welfare emergency funds to make one-time \$200 per child "back to school" payments to welfare and food stamp recipients. Some recipients used the money, as [CBS News put it](#), to purchase "flat screen TVs, iPods and video gaming systems." Convenience stores in low-income areas "noted marked increases in beer, lotto and cigarette sales."
 - a. Was that a wise use of taxpayer money, in your view?
 - b. Does New York State or – to your knowledge, representing APHSA – any other State plan to issue "back to school checks" this summer like those New York paid last summer that were spent on alcohol, lottery tickets and flat screen TVs?
 - c. If so, do you plan to utilize welfare emergency funds for such one-time payments again?
4. Your testimony calls for a number of funding increases for TANF and related programs in its coming reauthorization.
 - a. How much specifically are you proposing to increase Federal spending in all?
 - b. How would State spending be affected by these changes?
 - c. What recommendations do you have for paying for these Federal spending increases?

I would appreciate your response to these questions by March 30, 2010. Please send your response to the attention of Matt Weidinger, Staff Director, Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, Committee on Ways and Means Republicans, U.S. House of Representatives, B-316 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. In addition to a hard copy, please submit an electronic copy of your response in WordPerfect or Microsoft Word format to Mike.Stober@mail.house.gov and Moyer.McCoy@mail.house.gov.

Committee on Ways and Means Republicans
Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support
Page 3
March 16, 2010

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions for the record. If you have any questions concerning this request, you may reach Matt Weidinger at (202) 225-4021.

Sincerely yours,



John Linder
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Income Security
and Family Support



Charles Boustany
Subcommittee on Income Security
and Family Support



Peter Roskam
Subcommittee on Income Security
and Family Support