

Unfinished Business: Why Cities Matter to Welfare Reform

Washington

An analysis of welfare caseloadsⁱ in the 89 urban counties that contain the 100 largest citiesⁱⁱ found that:

- In 1999, ten states, including Washington, accounted for nearly 70 percent of the nation's welfare caseloads, up significantly from 42.5 percent in 1994. The bulk of the national welfare population can be found in: California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington. These ten states contained 53 percent of the overall national population in 1999.
- While urban welfare caseloads are declining rapidly, they are shrinking more slowly than national caseloads. The state of Washington and King County (Seattle) are no exception. While the nation's welfare

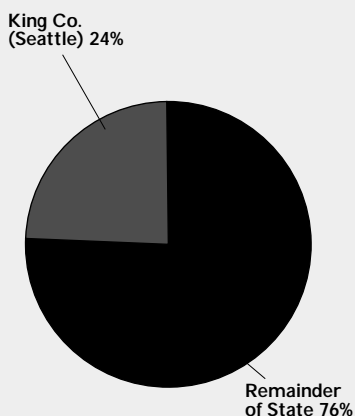
caseloads dropped by 51.5 percent between 1994 and 1999, the state and King County lagged behind the nation. Washington's welfare rolls declined by 36.0 percent, and King County experienced a slightly higher decline of 43.0 percent. In 1999, there were 65,744 cases in Washington and 13,957 in King County.

- Unlike many urban counties, King County's share of Washington's families on welfare declined slightly between 1994 and 1999. King County contained 21.2 percent of state welfare cases in 1999, down from 23.8 percent in 1994.
- King County—an exception to the national trend—had less than its “fair share” of its state's welfare caseload. King County was home to 28.9 percent of Washington's

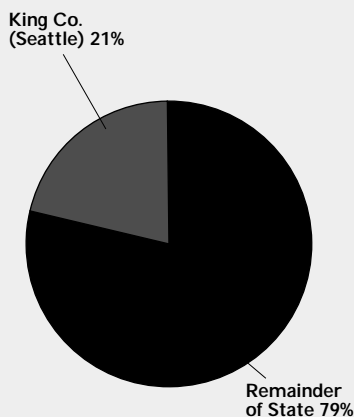
residents, and was home to 21.2 percent of its welfare recipients, a Fair Share Index of 0.7.ⁱⁱⁱ

- Some racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented on the King County welfare rolls compared to their numbers in the total population. In King County, whites comprise more than 80 percent of the total population, but less than half of the welfare rolls. Blacks are a mere six percent of the total population, but more than a quarter of King County's welfare caseload. While Hispanics are similarly represented in the county's welfare and overall populations, welfare cases in the “other” racial category—encompassing Asians and Native Americans—are over-represented on the welfare rolls.^{iv}

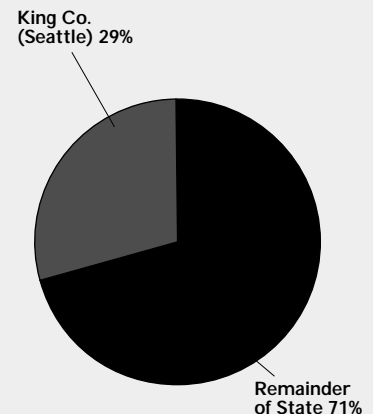
A. Share of Washington's Welfare Caseload, 1994



B. Share of Washington's Welfare Caseload, 1999



C. Share of Washington's Total Population, 1999





Washington Data Table

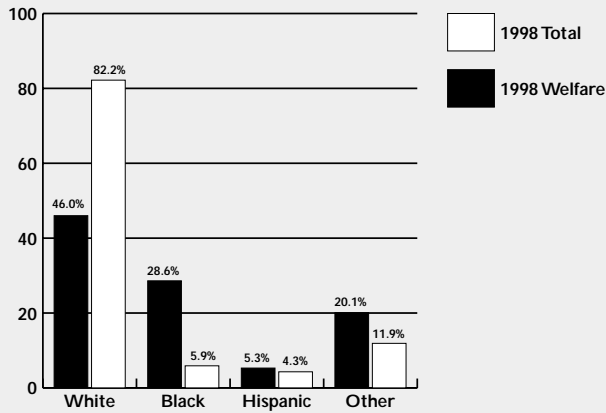
	Welfare Cases 1999	% Decline in Welfare Cases 1994–1999	% of State Caseload 1994	% of State Caseload 1999	% of Total State Population 1999	Fair Share Index 1999	City Concentrated Poverty Rate ^a 1990	% of County Population in Central City ^a 1998
Washington	65,744	36.0%						
King Co. (Seattle)	13,957	43.0%	23.8%	21.2%	28.9%	0.7	4.3%	32.5%

Right: The map indicates the change in concentration of state welfare caseloads in King County (Seattle) between 1994 and 1999. King County experienced a slight decrease in its concentration of Washington State's welfare cases, declining from 23.8 percent to 21.2 percent.





King County Racial and Ethnic Composition: Total Population vs. Welfare Caseload, 1998



Endnotes

- i The caseload data reflect the number of welfare cases, not individual recipients. Welfare cases may include a two-parent household with children, a single-parent household with children, or cases where there is no adult in the assistance unit (child-only cases). The data also reflect the number of cases that received cash assistance under Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and its successor, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).
- ii Because welfare programs, both AFDC and TANF, are typically administered at the county-level, the caseload data reflect the county caseloads, not the number of cases within the central cities. For the most part, the use of county-level caseload data may understate the central city welfare trends because of the inclusion of welfare cases from suburbs.
- iii The Fair Share Index conveys the share of the state welfare population contained in a county, compared with the county's share of the overall state population. The Fair Share Index is a ratio of two figures: the county's percentage of the state welfare caseload in 1999 divided by the county's percentage of the state total population in 1999.
- iv Percentages may not add up to 100 percent, since the ethnic category "Hispanic" may overlap with other racial categories.
- v The concentrated poverty rate reflects the percentage of the city population that lived in census tracts where 40 percent of the residents were poor in 1990 (the most recent year for which concentrated poverty data is available). Concentrated poverty is associated with the social characteristics and behaviors that define the so-called "hard-to-serve" welfare population: illiteracy, chronic unemployment, poor work history, no high school diploma, low skills, teenage pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births.
- vi The percentage of the county population that lives in the central city indicates how "urban" the county and, by extension, the welfare caseload actually is. Counties in the Southwest and West are relatively larger than the Northeastern and Midwestern counties and contain larger suburban populations. We would expect that the welfare population is more urban even in relatively more suburban counties. The indicator serves as a rough estimate of how well the county welfare data captures city-specific welfare trends.

Full Report Available at:
www.brookings.edu/urban

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