

Welfare Rolls Drop Sharply in Suburbs but Slower in the District

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THE WELFARE TO WORK SERIES OF REPORTS

The Greater Washington Research Center has been tracking welfare reform in the Washington area. The Research Center periodically distributes its findings and its recommendations about government data collection, presentation, and decision process through this series of reports.

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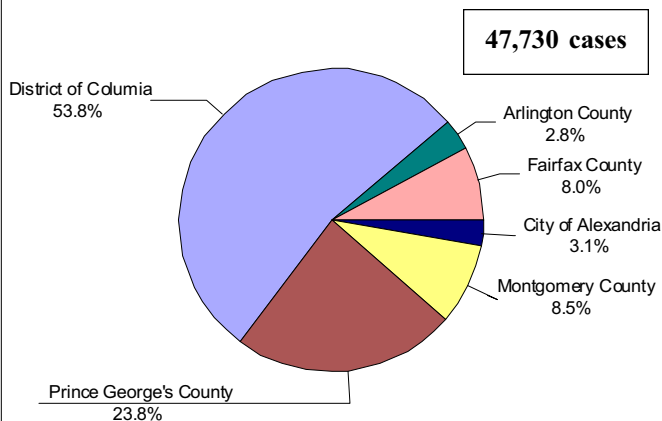
Since federal welfare reform was enacted in 1996, the Washington area has seen a 50 percent reduction in welfare cases from 47,730 in January 1996 to 24,020 in March 2000. The declines range from a 78 percent reduction in Montgomery County to a 32 percent reduction in the District. As a result of these decreases, Montgomery County had only 898 cases open in March 2000. In contrast, the District after its decrease, still had 17,413 cases open.

The lower rate of decrease in the District combined with a much larger beginning caseload has resulted in a concentration of the remaining welfare cases in the District. In March 2000, almost three-fourths of the area's cases are in the District compared to January 1996, when only a little over half were in the District. Prince George's County, the jurisdiction with the second largest caseload, has seen its share decrease sharply from 24 percent of the area's cases to 14 percent as a result of a 70 percent decline in its cases.

The concentration of welfare cases in the District is even more dramatic when looked at relative to population. In the Washington area, there were an average of 7 welfare cases for each 1,000 population in March 2000. In the District, there were 34

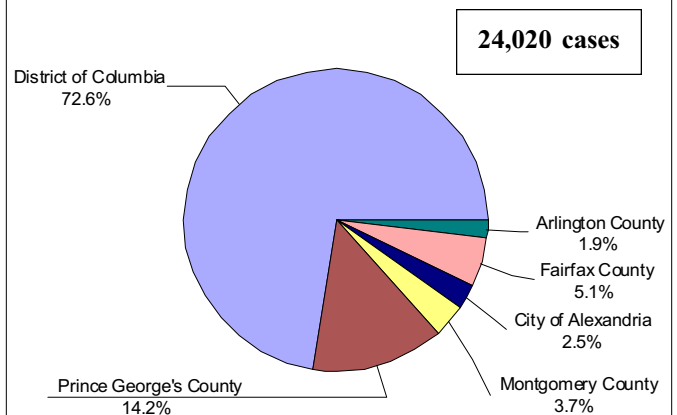
Washington Area TANF Cases

January 1996



Washington Area TANF Cases

March 2000



cases per 1,000 population and in Montgomery County, only 1 case per 1,000 population. The highest suburban ratio was Alexandria's 5 per 1,000 population. This concentration of cases poses severe administrative and fiscal challenges to the District government in its efforts to reduce welfare dependency.

DECLINE IN CASES SLOWS

Across the Washington area the rate of decline in cases slowed markedly from an area average of 20.9 and 18.4 percent in each of the one year periods ending in March 1999 and March 1998, respectively, to a decline of just 9.5 percent for the year ending in March 2000. The District's 8.5 percent decline in the year ending March 2000 was again the lowest of the area jurisdictions, and unless a dramatic change occurs, the District is unlikely to achieve an overall decrease in cases even close to those being achieved in the suburbs. The slowing rates of decline in most jurisdictions is not unexpected as the welfare rolls increasingly are made up of those who are harder to place in jobs. In addition, cases exempt from time limits, such as ones with only a child receiving assistance, make up an increasing share of the remaining cases in some jurisdictions. Only the City of Alexandria had a larger case decrease in the latest year compared to the prior two years.

THE DISTRICT MAY FACE SERIOUS PROBLEMS

The Research Center began its monitoring of welfare reform in the Washington area three years ago. The basic concept was that by comparing outcomes in the District and the Maryland and Virginia suburbs different patterns of behavior would emerge based on the different policies employed by the area governments. The apparent success in moving people off welfare in the suburbs contrasts with the much less favorable results in the District, but the causes of the difference in rates are not readily ap-

Number of TANF Cases, March 2000

	Cases Per 1,000 Population	
District	17,413	33.6
Prince George's	3,418	4.4
Montgomery	898	1.1
Alexandria	608	5.1
Arlington	461	2.6
Fairfax	1,222	1.3
Total	24,020	7.0

parent. Certainly, the management challenge of the high beginning caseload in the District slowed initial efforts, but even after ample time has elapsed for the District to complete its plans, it continues to trail the suburbs in case reduction rates.

As federal time limits and other sanctions become increasingly important, the District will likely face a welfare crisis that will not be experienced in the suburbs. Either substantial numbers of current welfare recipients will have to be summarily deprived of assistance or the District government may have to assume the full cost of continued assistance for some recipients. The District's large caseload will be particularly troublesome if the local economy slows when many recipients are meeting time limits.

**Rate of Change in TANF Cases in Washington Area
1996-2000**

	Jan '96- Mar '97	Mar '97- Mar '98	Mar '98- Mar '99	Mar '99- Mar '00	Jan '96- Mar '00
District	-5.1%	-12.8%	-10.6%	-8.2%	-32.3%
Prince George's	-10.1	-25.4	-44.5	-10.5	-69.9
Montgomery	-31.7	-33.1	-41.0	-10.4	-77.8
Alexandria	24.7	-12.0	-17.7	-19.8	-58.6
Arlington	-22.1	-27.2	-25.4	13.6	-65.4
Fairfax	-32.4	-27.1	-21.7	-13.6	-68.1
Total Area	-11.8%	-18.4%	-20.9%	-9.5%	-49.7%