

Testimony by Prof. Archibald Stuart on Raised Bill No. 5360 on Children in the Recession

My testimony is based on the belief that Speaker Donovan in creating the Task Force on Children in the Recession gave us an opportunity to deal with the basic rights of children to sustenance especially in terms of food, clothing, housing and medical care. In my opinion this gives us an opportunity to look at two cuts in benefits to children and their families in recent years in what is now called the Temporary Assistance of Needy Families program (TANF) operated by the state Department of Social Services. The first was the adoption of the flat grant program that pays families a flat benefit based solely on family size that does not consider what the cost of actual rent and utilities to the family.. Families who pay no rent due to living with relatives receive the same flat grant. Clearly the flat grant does not cover the rent that many families are forced to pay and increased homelessness has been a result. The second was the even more drastic cut that limited benefits for TANF recipients with an employable head to 21 months. This was sold on the belief that there were many jobs going unfilled due to the unavailability of workers. There is scant evidence that the time limit reduced overall unemployment and if it achieved anything made it a little easier to fill part time low wage jobs so that most who found these part time jobs did not earn enough to escape poverty. My own analysis is that these cuts were really an effort to punish the employable poor so as to improve the morale of the low paid laborer. These cuts were clearly targeted to African Americans and Hispanics who disproportionately represent the unemployed poor. The cuts deprived children and their families of the basic human right to sustenance which is a form of human oppression and hence the cuts were really a form of oppression for African Americans and Hispanics that White non -Hispanics have a need to deny. This oppression has been covered up by the media and elsewhere because it is not what White non -Hispanics want to hear but most African Americans that I have talked to believe that it is oppression targeted to their children and their families. I think that the proposed legislation also tries to cover this up and hence I want to challenge those who have drafted this bill to abandon their racism and be honest about what these cuts are really about namely oppression of African American children and their families. With this as a basis I would like to submit the following modest changes in the proposed bill:

Change in Sec, 1,b, to read "prevents the costs to human rights and fiscal cost of the recession".

Next in 1 , b,, c, to capitalize, the temporary family assistance program to read "Temporary Assistance of Needy Families program" that seems to be an effort to cover up the TANF program.

Next in sec 4. a, add a no 5 to read "study the impact of the recession and especially flat grant and the 21 month time limit on the human rights of children and their families to basic sustenance including food, clothing, housing and medical care as defined in article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 27 of the Convention of Rigts of the Child.

Lastly in Sec.8 add that when unemployment exceeds 8 percent that the 21 month time limit for employable family heads in the TANF program be eliminated..