

Does Washington Attract Welfare Recipients From Other States?

Background

Policymakers in some states are considering limiting public assistance grants for applicants who have recently migrated from states that offer lower monthly grants. This policy change reflects the belief that states offering higher monthly grants attract welfare recipients. In January 1992, Washington's maximum AFDC benefit for a family of three ranked 10th highest out of the 50 states. When compared with neighboring states, Washington has a *higher* public assistance grant amount than Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, and a *lower* grant amount than California. Apart from California, eight additional states pay higher grants than Washington. We get migrants from these states as well.

Family Income Study Findings

Analysis of Family Income Study data shows that families who moved to Washington and went on public assistance came from both higher- and lower-benefit states, as well as other countries.

- 11 percent of the families on public assistance in March 1988 moved into Washington State and began receiving public assistance within 6 months of entering the state; 13 percent moved into Washington and began receiving assistance within 12 months of entering the state.
- Of those who moved to Washington and used public assistance within 12 months, 50 percent came from states that had a *lower* public assistance grant, 30 percent came from states that had a *higher* public assistance grant, and 20 percent came from *other countries*.

Discussion

Historically, the number of people moving to Washington has been more than the number of people moving out. This migration increases as the state's economic situation improves. Family Income Study data shows that recent migrants are a small portion of Washington's public assistance population. Some share of this portion may have moved to Washington because our welfare payments are relatively generous. Others may have moved here because in the late 1980s Washington became a "magnet" for economic growth and opportunities.

If public assistance grants were reduced for recent migrants from states with grant levels less than Washington's, only about *half* of the *recent migrants* on welfare would be affected.

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