



**Testimony of Joyce Campbell, Associate Executive Director  
TO  
NJ Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee  
March 7, 2016**

Good afternoon Chairman Vitale and fellow committee members, and thank you for hearing my testimony today. I am Joyce Campbell, Associate Executive Director for Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton. Today I provide this testimony on behalf of the state's five Catholic Charities' organizations which have provided services to those living in poverty and adversity for more than 100 years. Each year Catholic Charities New Jersey year serves over 280,000 people. So, we are no strangers to the increased levels of poverty, particularly amongst the children in our state.

Please know that I am also Vice President of the Anti-Poverty Network of NJ (APN) and am sharing their support of this bill as well. Serena Rice, APN's Executive Director unfortunately is out of state, but has been tireless on this issue on behalf of all of our Network's members.

As I prepared for this testimony I quickly searched online for the history of our national organization, Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) and how they have addressed welfare reform over the past twenty years, this year being the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). I found that we've been there every step of the way, expressing concern about reforms that do not move people out of poverty, and in particular with increased work requirements that have been put in place since 1996. And, I know that CCUSA stands behind me today as I support increased benefit amounts.

When my twins were born in 1987, the year in which the last increase was made to welfare benefits, it was so hard to comprehend that a three person family needing assistance had to rely on \$424. What is more astonishing is that those families still try to rely on this same amount 29 years later. I simply can't imagine how I could have raised my children without any increase in income, regardless of its source. In 1992 I started a job as a social worker at a pre-natal clinic and saw the impact of the family cap, with women scared of how they would pay for diapers and food for their baby. And, that was all before the reforms of 1996, with time limits and increased work requirements that only got more difficult and did not easily help families move to self-sufficiency.

There are three thoughts that many of us, including Catholic Charities, judge policy against – those being human dignity, the common good and justice. Those three powerful concepts don't hold up well when considering the changes, or the lack thereof, with TANF. To think that policy changes have increased deep childhood poverty and that the rate in NJ is 25% larger than the rest of the nation is shameful. I could cite all the numbers but they have been covered so well in the NJ Policy Perspective's "Lost Opportunities for New Jersey's Children" that it is not necessary. It's only necessary to acknowledge the numbers and support the recommendations. If our neighboring states have found ways to increase the benefits, then we need to find the will to do the same.

At our Catholic Charities agencies in NJ we have seen, throughout the years, the impact that changes to welfare have had on those who struggled while receiving the benefit and those who had the benefits discontinued before they were self-sufficient. Our experience clearly mirrors the declining numbers receiving TANF. What makes it more imperative to increase the benefits today is that too many NJ children are living in impoverished families, which comes at a tremendous cost to them and to all of us. Investing in increasing the TANF benefit by 30% over 3 years and repealing the family cap is the just thing to do to preserve human dignity and improve the common good. Thank you.

Joyce Campbell

[jcampbell@cctrenton.org](mailto:jcampbell@cctrenton.org)

609-394-5181 x1138