

Mr. REES. I assure you, you are not, Madam Chairman.

Now, given the high labor force participation of mothers in general, what is so special about mothers on welfare? There are several answers—including the lack of earnings incentives, the low skills of most welfare mothers, and discrimination against Negroes and Spanish Americans. One of these answers is that the caseworker, rather than the welfare mother, may decide whether the mother is needed at home. The decision may also turn heavily—probably too heavily—on the availability of organized day-care centers, as opposed to informal child-care arrangements.

The Social Security Act Amendments of 1967 further enhance the power of caseworkers to decide whether mothers should work by providing that mothers who refuse work or training shall be denied benefits. If adequate incentives were present in the AFDC program, I submit the decision whether to work could safely be entrusted to the mother herself.

Let me hasten to add that I do not favor child neglect or oppose day-care centers. But I do not see why society should enforce higher standards of child care for welfare mothers than for self-supporting waitresses or beauticians, whose arrangements for child care are a matter of public concern only when they are flagrantly inadequate. We do not really believe that waitresses are by and large better mothers—we simply do not have a set of institutions that scrutinizes their behavior so closely.

Existing public assistance programs also have perverse effects on the mobility of labor. They induce families to move to places where welfare benefits are high or to places where it is relatively easy to get on welfare, even though these places may already have a very high unemployment rate for unskilled workers. The movement of labor toward job opportunities is, of course, desirable and should be encouraged, but no such case can be made for movement induced by public assistance. Those who are not likely to become self-supporting can best be supported among their friends and where living costs are low. The solution of this problem requires a larger Federal Government role in public assistance, such as a minimum level of public assistance benefits applicable to all States.

Let me now turn to broader issues. A family whose income comes entirely from an income-maintenance program, whether it is a welfare program or an insurance program, is a deadweight burden on the rest of the economy. If there are no compelling social reasons why members of that family cannot do some work—even part-time or occasional work—they should be encouraged to take employment. By becoming even partially self-supporting, they can increase the national output, reduce the burden of their support on others, and at the same time improve their standard of living. In this way, families on public assistance can also gain increased dignity and self-respect, and lessen their sense of dependence on others. Through work experience, and perhaps on-the-job training, some of them can, in time, become fully self-supporting.