

WRN News

WELFARE REFORM NETWORK

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008

City Council Hearings Seek to Promote Women's Rights: Increase Earnings and Expand Employment Opportunities

The City Council Women's Issues Committee, chaired by Helen Sears, recently held two public hearings to draw attention to the continuing barriers that women face in achieving higher earnings. The first, held on September 20, was entitled, "Are There Enough Non-Traditional Employment Opportunities for Women in NYC?" This hearing sought to expose remaining obstacles that prevent women from accessing and succeeding in traditionally male occupations, such as construction, engineering and technology.

Testimony was presented by Maria Torres from the office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and Rebuilding. Her comments emphasized the work of the City's Commission on Construction Opportunity, which set a goal to fill 10% of apprentice slots with women starting in 2006. To accomplish this goal, the City has formed a partnership with Non-Traditional Employment for Women (NEW) to directly recruit more women into the construction industry. In addition, testimony was presented by other groups including: NEW, Legal Momentum, Women's Builders Council, and New York Women in Film and Television. In summary, they discussed the barriers that continue to hinder women's success in non-traditional fields, such as limited advancement opportunities, restricted task assignments on the worksite, and sexual harassment. Emphasizing the financial benefits of non-traditional positions compared to traditionally female fields, they recommended that the City promote the hiring and retention of women for these jobs; include enforceable equal opportunity clauses in contracts with on-site monitoring; and expand recruitment and training programs targeted to women.

The second hearing, "An Update on the Gender Wage Gap," co-chaired by Councilmember Larry Seabrook, Chair of the Civil Rights Committee, was held on October 30. Councilmember Sears ex-

pressed disappointment that several enforcement agencies invited to speak did not appear, including the Equal Employment Practices Commission and the NYC Commission on Human Rights. However, staff from Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney's office provided testimony emphasizing the importance of correcting unequal pay practices that have resulted in full-time working women earning only 77 cents for every dollar men earn. In addition, her testimony mentioned the "mommy penalty" and "daddy bonus" that continues to exist, with mothers earning about 2.5% less than women without children and fathers receiving 2.1% more in earnings than men without children. Congresswoman Maloney is a co-sponsor of the Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 1338), which would strengthen enforcement mechanisms to prevent forms of discrimination against women. Testimony was also submitted by Legal Momentum, which noted that women's earnings lag behind men's even when women have higher levels of education; and women in 2006 were 41% more likely than men to fall below the federal poverty line.

-Jill Poklemba, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies



Fundraising Update

A warm thanks goes out to everyone who has paid 2007-2008 membership dues, helping to raise more than \$1500 so far.

If you have not yet made a contribution to this year's dues drive we hope you will consider doing so at this time. While we value your membership regardless of your dues-paying status, we also hope that you will formalize your commitment to WRN and help to ensure its future. Please contact Rachelle Rae House at rhouse@fpwa.org for more information or to make a contribution.

Please use the contribution form on page 3 of this newsletter.

City Council Holds Hearing on New Policy that Leaves Homeless Families without Shelter

On October 12, 2007 the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) implemented a new policy affecting the provision of shelter to homeless families. The policy states that homeless families applying for emergency shelter, who DHS determines have other housing available to them, will not be provided with overnight shelter placements while attempting to challenge DHS' determination. The City states that this policy is necessary to close a loophole through which families with access to other housing are receiving shelter from DHS, making it more difficult to provide for families truly in need. However, data published by DHS itself indicates that one-third of families applying for shelter are found eligible and given shelter placements after being found ineligible at least one time, pointing to some number of erroneous eligibility determinations. These mistakes now bring with them higher stakes. Some families, without any place to go, are being turned away to the streets.

At a hearing held by the City Council General Welfare Committee on October 24th, DHS Commissioner Robert Hess testified about the policy change and answered questions posed by Councilmembers regarding implementation and details of the policy. Mr. Don Allen and his two sons who had been denied shelter twelve days prior, also testified offering their story as an example of the problems some families face in applying for shelter. Mr. Allen lost his apartment after an accident which left him with rods in his back and unable to work. He moved in with his mother for a short time, both to try and care for her, and to get on his feet. Mr. Allen's mother has Parkinson's disease, cancer and a host of other medical concerns. During the Allen family's stay, her doctors informed her that under no cir-

cumstances should she care for anyone else in her apartment or allow them to reside with her as a result of her rapidly declining health. With nowhere else to go, the Allen's applied for shelter. Despite providing the City with written documentation from his mother's doctors, Mr. Allen and his children were found ineligible and denied a place to stay. The family slept, along with other families, for approximately two weeks on the floor of a nearby church that offered to take them in temporarily.

In the month since this policy was implemented, DHS has reported that some 146 families have been found ineligible for shelter, although it is not clear how many of these families were given a place to stay. Many families who have not been given shelter have been in touch with various organizations and report that they too have been forced to stay in public places, because they are unable to return to medically unsafe or inappropriate homes, abusive situations, overcrowded spaces or apartments with hazardous conditions. Homeless families in need of assistance with their applications for shelter or who have been turned away from PATH can come to the Crisis Intervention Program at the Coalition for the Homeless for assistance.

Crisis Intervention is a walk in clinic located at 129 Fulton Street in downtown Manhattan. Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday the first 50 people who arrive are seen between the hours of 9am and 2pm and Wednesday and Friday the first 30 people are seen between the hours of 9am and 11am.

-Lindsey Davis, Coalition for the Homeless

Recent Reports of Interest

- *The State of Black New York City 2007.* The New York Urban League: http://www.nyul.org/docs/2007_SoBNYC_1-193_lo.pdf
- *Rising Food Lines, Sinking Economy: Increase in NYC Hunger is Early Proof of Economic Slow-Down.* Annual Hunger Survey, New York City Coalition Against Hunger, November 2007: <http://www.nyccah.org/files/2007%20Hunger%20Survey%20Report.pdf>
- *Child Care and Development Block Grant Participation in 2006.* The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP): http://clasp.org/publications/ccdbgparticipation_2006.pdf

WELFARE REFORM NETWORK

c/o Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
 281 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10010
 Phone: (212) 801-1316, Fax: (212) 414-1328



Dear WRN Supporter:

The Welfare Reform Network (WRN) is initiating its annual dues appeal for 2007-2008. Since its inception in 1990, the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA) has generously sponsored WRN along with the support of annual contributions from members. During our 2006-07 fundraising campaign, members helped raise **\$3785.00**. These funds have helped to fund a coordinator who works with FPWA's Policy Director to improve the quality of the WRN News, help raise the public advocacy profile of WRN, research strategies to advocate for increasing the public assistance grant, continue to research the impact of the new Health and Human Services regulations, and organize speakers for the monthly meetings and timely forums, among other activities.

Your participation helped WRN make progress on a number of issues during the past legislative session. For the first time in sixteen years the NY State Assembly introduced a bill to raise the basic public assistance grant. While this modest increase did not pass, it paves the way for a stronger fight next season. Although the bill was ultimately vetoed, your participation and support also helped to bring the Nontraditional Job and Sustainable Wage Bill into the public discussion. In the coming year we will be working hard to increase the basic public assistance grant, maximize education and training options and continue to respond to issues as they arise.

With new HHS work participation definitions further eroding the flexibility to engage public assistance recipients in creative and beneficial activities, the role of WRN is more important than ever. A critical component to making sure WRN continues to link program recipients, service providers and advocates is **membership dues**. We are asking WRN members who are able to do so to contribute to the future of WRN according to the following annual dues schedule. A donation above these amounts would be greatly appreciated:

Individuals	Note: Tax Deductible Contribution!!!	\$50.00
Organizations	Budget \$500,000 and Less	\$75.00
Organizations	Budget \$500,001 to \$2,000,000	\$125.00
Organizations	Budget \$2,000,001 and More	\$200.00

WRN is in the unique position of convening social service providers; welfare, hunger, and housing advocates; grassroots organizations; legal advocacy groups; and current and former welfare recipients who share information and strategize about advocacy efforts that influence critical decisions related to poor New Yorkers. WRN – now more than ever - needs you as an active partner in forwarding our mission to support humane public policies. **We need your voice, your ideas, your participation and, yes, - we need your financial support.** Thank you in advance for your generosity. We look forward to working with you in our future endeavors.

Sincerely,

The Welfare Reform Network (WRN) Steering Committee

Count me in as a contributing WRN member! Enclosed is my donation of:

- \$50 \$75 \$125 \$200

I am including an additional \$ _____

Please make checks payable to: FPWA-WRN. Send your check today to the attention of: Jill Poklemba, FPWA-WRN, 281 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010.

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Progress and Next Steps Towards Increased Food Stamps Participation

Qualifying for food stamps is frustrating, time-consuming and often humiliating, preventing hundreds of thousands from receiving benefits to which they are entitled. Working people are less likely to enroll, while maintaining benefits is particularly difficult for those with no income. Despite some progress on reducing participation costs, much work remains.

Since January 2006, HRA has expanded office hours by 2.5 hours per week in one office per borough and initiated the paperless office system (POS), to improve efficiency and reduce wait times. However, in-person interviews may not be fully available during extended office hours and waivers of face-to-face interviews are still available only on a limited basis. Further, while POS may improve efficiency and help prevent lost documents, it has yet to be fully implemented or proven effective.

With respect to recertification specifically, New York City has finally entered the state phone recertification program at two of twenty-five centers, and, on November 20, OTDA announced a plan to allow for annual recertification, rather than requiring clients with income to repeat the process every six months. Still, the City's refusal to apply for the Able Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWD) waiver unnecessarily forces visits from clients with no income every three months.

New York must consider offsetting the direct and hidden costs incurred by individuals and families participating in the Food Stamps Program. A standard allowance for client expenses like subway fare and lost wages could substantially improve participation and ensure that eligible New Yorkers have access to food. For more information:

A Better Recipe for New York City: Less Red Tape, More Food on the Table, January 2006,
http://www.urbanjustice.org/pdf/publications/better_recipe_full_rpt.pdf

Keeping Food on the Table: Challenges to Food Stamps Retention in New York City, September 2007,
<http://www.urbanjustice.org/pdf/projects/KeepingFoodOnTheTable.pdf>

-Rebecca Widom, Urban Justice Center

Court Victory Will Restore Benefits to Tens of Thousands of Families With Members With Disabilities

On September 13, 2007, victory was at last secured in the class action *Doe v. Doar*, which challenged the state's method of calculating public assistance grants for families with members with disabilities. The lawsuit, brought by the Empire Justice Center, New York Legal Assistance Group, Legal Aid Society of New York City, and the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, invalidated 18 NYCRR 352.2 (b). This effectively reversed the state's policy of penalizing families with members receiving SSI by prorating their benefits instead of recognizing that the income is intended to go solely towards the extra disability-related costs borne by individuals with disabilities. As a result, public assistance grants must now take into account the additional financial costs of caring for family members with disabilities, including the high costs of medicine, doctor's visits, therapy, and transportation.

Under a negotiated remedial plan, many families with members with disabilities who are currently in receipt of public benefits will receive retroactive benefits to compensate them for their losses incurred due to the invalid budgeting rule. Rebudgeting was to be completed in November 2007 for families in New York City with open public assistance cases, and retroactive benefits are due to be calculated and paid in March 2008.

Families living in other parts of the state will have their cases rebudgeted on a slightly different timeline. In all, the state is expected to return millions of dollars in unlawfully withheld assistance to tens of thousands of eligible families.

-Lynn Lu, National Center for Law and Economic Justice

OTDA Takes Steps to Increase Participation in Education and Training

OTDA has taken action to increase the percentage of welfare recipients engaged in vocational education and job skills training. In their 2008-09 Local Employment Plans, all social services districts must describe steps they will take to increase the numbers placed in these activities by 20% by January 2009.

WRN PAC members will continue their work to monitor compliance by HRA and to advocate for recipients' rights to receive information about how to enroll in education and training programs.

-Jill Poklemba, FPWA

WRN Member Meets with OTDA Welfare-to-Work Officials

On October 31, Barbara Edwards Delsman, Executive Director of The HOPE Program and active WRN member, met with Barbara Guinn, Director of Welfare-to-Work, and John Haley, Bureau Chief of Contract Development and Monitoring Bureau at OTDA. In general, Ms. Edwards Delsman's presentation reinforced WRN's mission to advocate for greater public investments in education and training opportunities for "hard-to-serve" populations, particularly those living below the poverty level and/or receiving public assistance. To demonstrate the value of these investments, she discussed the specific work readiness services that HOPE provides... *(continued on page 6)*

City Council Holds WeCARE Oversight Hearing

On October 22, 2007, the General Welfare Committee of the New York City Council held an oversight hearing on the WeCARE program. WeCARE is a program intended to serve approximately 45,000 cash assistance recipients with disabilities per year in New York City. The program encompasses a broad array of services, including comprehensive medical assessments to determine employability, drafting individualized service plans, conducting vocational evaluations, providing and monitoring "Wellness Plans" to monitor compliance with medical care of clients found to have untreated medical and mental health conditions, to assisting clients with permanent disabilities in applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The program is operated by two contractors, Arbor E & T LLC, and F.E.G.S., and several subcontractors. The Human Resources Administration (HRA)'s three-year contracts with Arbor and F.E.G.S. are up for renewal in December.

The focus of the hearing was program performance and HRA's monitoring and enforcement of the contracts. Robert Doar, Commissioner of the New York City HRA, testified at the hearing. He acknowledged that he was not satisfied with contract performance over the first year of the program, although he said he was "more satisfied over time." The Commissioner indicated that HRA has decided to renew the contracts with Arbor and F.E.G.S., and that Arbor had recently subcontracted with a new entity to perform medical assessments.

Committee Chair Bill DeBlasio questioned the Commissioner on a number of issues, including the re-

sults of an internal investigation of Arbor's program performance conducted by ResCARE, Arbor's parent company, which found severe deficiencies in many aspects of the program. Mr. DeBlasio stated that while he had no doubt that HRA's intentions were good, good intentions were insufficient. He expressed concern that the contractors did not have sufficient incentives to improve their performance because they had not suffered any consequences as a result of their inadequate performance. He also indicated that problems with the program would be a factor in the Council's budget hearings next spring.

Others who testified at the hearing included Cary LaCheen, from the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, Alexa Kasdan from Community Voices Heard, and Susan Welber from the Legal Aid Society. Michelle Valdez, Mia Bell, Tyletha Samuels, and Minerva Tauro, all of whom are current or former program participants, also testified. Advocates and program participants' testimony focused on large drop-out rates in the program, the failure to provide outreach to clients who miss appointments, lack of accommodations for participants' disabilities, cursory medical examinations, the failure to consider documentation from participants' treating doctors when making employability decisions, unnecessary and duplicative appointments, the lack of bona fide skills training in training programs, and the failure to provide placements that are based on clients' skills and interests.

-Cary LaCheen, National Center for Law and Economic Justice

(Meeting with OTDA continued from page 5)

...to those in extreme poverty, including: comprehensive assessments; work internships; job retention and career advancement services; and follow-up services. She also discussed HOPE's research on the impact of education in determining clients' employment outcomes. HOPE's study of 668 participants found that education levels strongly influenced starting salary, with high school drop-outs earning the lowest salaries and those with some college education earning the highest salaries. This information was supplemented with a copy of the suggested OTDA Implementation Plan to expand education and training opportunities for welfare recipients that WRN Policy & Advocacy Committee (PAC) members had already sent via e-mail to Ms. Guinn earlier in October.

Overall, Ms. Edwards Delsman received a positive and receptive response from the OTDA officials. She explained that the cost of providing intensive case services to those with greater barriers to employment is not that expensive. As an example, she mentioned her program's use of PhD students with externship requirements to comprise her mental health services team. The provision of these and other supportive services to help clients overcome barriers has made a significant impact on clients' employment outcomes at a relatively low cost to HOPE.

*-Barbara Edwards Delsman, The HOPE Program
(edits by Jill Poklemba)*

Francoise Jacobsohn: Empowering Women through Non-Traditional Employment

On November 6, 2007, Francoise Jacobsohn, manager of the Equality Works project at Legal Momentum, presented an overview of her work in promoting non-traditional employment programs for women at the WRN general meeting. She stressed that access to male-dominated trades such as construction can empower women to earn higher wages and achieve economic security. In addition, she presented new research which demonstrates that poverty rates continue to be higher for women compared to men. Francoise also emphasized that women's earnings are lower than men's earnings overall, even when women's education levels are higher. She referred WRN members to a 2001 report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), "Working First but Working Poor: The Need for Education and Training Following Welfare Reform," which revealed that women are still predominantly employed in low-wage, unstable jobs.

While the construction industry, which offers higher wages and better benefits, is booming in New York City, Francoise noted that only 3% of construction workers are women. She discussed her participation in Mayor Bloomberg's Commission on Construction Opportunity, which was formed in 2005 to set goals to expand employment opportunities in construction for minorities and the economically disadvantaged. The Commission set a goal that for a 4-year period beginning in 2006, 10% of construction apprentice slots in New York City should be filled by

women. However, Francoise further explained that even after women are hired, advocates still need to ensure that women's rights are protected at the worksite. Incidents of sexual harassment and limited opportunities for women to perform the same construction tasks that men perform are still all too common and accepted.

Pauline Sealy, a 22-year journey sheet metal worker with Local 28 who graduated from the NYC Technical Careers program, came with Francoise to discuss her experiences with the WRN members. She said that the job offers her a great benefits package, including savings plans and paid time off. However, she verified that discrimination against women still exists and remains a barrier that she must fight every day. Despite these formidable obstacles, Pauline shows strength in asserting her rights and is an example of the success that women can achieve through non-traditional employment opportunities.

For more information visit:

The Equality Works project:

<http://www.legalmomentum.org/legalmomentum/programs/equalityworks/>

The Mayor's Commission on Construction Opportunity:

http://www.legalmomentum.org/legalmomentum/files/EqualityWorks_PressRelease100505.pdf

*-Jill Poklemba, Federation of Protestant
Welfare Agencies*

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">Meeting Calendar</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin-top: 20px;">Meetings at the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, 281 Park Avenue South (at 22nd St.), unless otherwise noted.</p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; margin-top: 0;">WRN General Membership Meetings:</p> <p><i>January 8, 2008, 9:30 a.m.</i> Guest speaker: <i>Denise Soffel</i>, Ph.D., Health Policy Coordinator, National Center for Law and Economy Justice</p> <p><i>February 5, 2008, 9:30 a.m.</i> Guest speaker: <i>Ray Singleton</i>, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, New York City Human Resources Administration, Employment Services</p> <p><i>March 4, 2008, 9:30 a.m.</i> Guest speaker: <i>Trudi Renwick</i>, Senior Economist, Fiscal Policy Institute</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

WRN Committee Meetings January- February

Child Care:
1/10/2008 and 2/14/2008,
 2:00–4:00 pm at FPWA.
 Contacts: *Sandy Socolar*, (212) 666-5925.

Policy & Advocacy Committee (PAC)
1/22/2008 and 2/19/2008,
 3:00–5:00 pm at FPWA.
 Contacts: *(Chairs Rotate each month) Jill Poklemba*, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, (212) 801-1393

Women, Welfare & Abuse Task Force:
2/12/2008, 3:00–4:30 pm at Sanctuary for Families. Please RSVP to Catherine.
 Contacts: *Catherine Shugrue Dos Santos*, Sanctuary for Families, (212) 349-6009, ext 283 or csdossantos@sffny.org & *E. Marie Ray*, Medgar Evers College, (718) 270-6475.

Education and Training Committee:
 Call committee contact for information.
 Contact: *Brooke Richie*, Resilience Law and Advocacy Project, richie@resiliencelaw.org

“Know Your Rights:” Client Empowerment trainings
 Please call contact for next scheduled training.
 Contact: *Roxanna Henry*, Welfare Rights Initiative, (212) 650-3592

Queer Economic Justice Network:
 Call committee contact for information.
 Contact: *Joseph DeFilippis*, (212) 564-3608.

About WRN. WRN, the Welfare Reform Network, is a coalition of organizations and individuals that advocates for humane income security policies. WRN is sponsored by the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). All meetings are open to the public. For more information about WRN or if you would like to contribute an article, please contact *Rachelle Rae House* at rhouse@fpwa.org or by phone at (212)-801-1316.

The WRN News is edited by *Rachelle Rae House*.