

# Michigan holds sham review process on welfare cuts

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In the face of national notoriety for Michigan's ruthless 48-month cash assistance welfare limit, Republican Gov. Rick Snyder initiated a series of mass appeals hearings this week.

The "rocket dockets" aim to give a fig leaf of legitimacy to a phony review process for Michigan residents challenging the brutal termination of all cash welfare benefits, estimated to affect over 30,000 of the state's neediest children. (See the photo collection: We are the 30,000)

More than 1,000 cases at various Department of Human Services (DHS) offices statewide were set for review in the "appeals" process over the incredibly short period of several days. At least 24 administrative law judges were assigned to the hearings, "with additional administrative law judges available if needed," stated DHS spokesperson Colleen Rosso to the *Detroit News*.

Those selected for appeal were not assigned to a court, but were interviewed by the judge via a telephone-conference hookup. According to the plaintiffs, the only issue pertinent to the judges was their length of time on welfare.

Moreover, the sudden calling of hearings was obviously based on the calculation that many appellants could not make arrangements for childcare or work on such short notice and would fail to appear. Welfare mothers were told to be at the offices by 8 a.m. on Monday if they wanted to have their appeals heard. Yet, true to form, reports stated that by 11 a.m. no one at the office on Lappin Street in Detroit's northeast side had spoken to a single judge.

Wyeberkeisha Eaton, who came to the DHS office for a hearing on Monday, was told she had to come back the next day. Eaton told the *Huffington Post* she felt the state had violated her right to due process.

"They should give more people time in order to apply for a job, to find a job. I mean if there [are] no jobs out there, what do you do?" Eaton asked.

In the beginning of November the state government began rigidly enforcing both a 48-month lifetime limit for receiving cash welfare benefits in the state and a 60-month federal limit, providing no waivers for families who were struggling to find work. The new law passed by the Republican-dominated legislature and Republican governor is the most draconian anti-welfare bill in the Midwest and possibly in the country.

The new measures cut 12,600 families on welfare off all cash assistance with almost all exemptions or deferrals that were previously in place excluded. Included in this figure are 11,188 adults and 29,707 children.

According to Terri Stengl, executive director for the Center for Civil Justice (CCJ), DHS and the state government are looking for any means to cut welfare recipients off cash assistance, whether it is a 48-month limit or a federal 60-month limit. While the state has instituted a 48-month lifetime limit, most of the people who have been cut off their benefits were removed based on a federal 60-month limit that was established in 1996 under the Clinton administration.

The federal policy, instituted in Michigan under Republican Governor John Engler, allowed exemptions for those working or looking for work. The federal guidelines also allowed exemptions for those with a disabled child. These restrictions were eliminated under the new rules.

It was previously disclosed that a large proportion of welfare recipients presently receiving benefits are also working, many in part-time jobs. The problem they face is the income they earn is so low they qualify for welfare assistance.

The cuts in welfare are a political assault against the living standards of the working class. This attack on the

most vulnerable sections of society—poor women with children—is part of the broadside against the working class as whole, the vast majority of whom are one paycheck, or one medical condition, away from financial disaster.

According to Gilda Jacobs, a former state senator and president of the non-profit Michigan League for Human Services, the only cost to the state for the welfare program was the administration of the federal program, or \$142 million. She pointed out that the cuts mean that the state will lose the federal funds—ironically forcing the state to possibly pay more in order to shelter a family rendered homeless as a result.

The notion that the cuts are irrational, from a short-term budgetary standpoint, may be true, but the essential political point is missed. The cuts in welfare are part of an offensive by the ruling class and the two big-business parties to roll back the social gains won by working people in an earlier period. Nationally, the Obama administration is proposing not just the elimination of what is left of welfare, but an assault on the entire postwar social framework, gutting Medicaid, Medicare, unemployment benefits and Social Security.

Already in Michigan unemployment benefits have been reduced from 26 weeks to 20 weeks, while the jobless rate in the state is one of the highest in the country at 9.2 percent. More than half of Michigan's unemployed are of prime working age (25-54) and spent a half-year or longer looking for work.

The latest US Census report on child poverty points to a steady increase since 2007, from 18.4 percent to 21.6 percent. This means that the number of children listed as being in poverty increased by more than 17 percent, to 15.7 million. The bureau reported 47.2 percent of the nearly 140,000 children in Detroit are poor, a staggering 20 percent increase over 2007 figures.



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