



Welfare Reform in Texas Has Not Worked, According to University of Texas at Austin Researchers

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AUSTIN, Texas — Most Texas families who leave welfare remain in or near poverty and many are likely to return to the welfare rolls in the future, say University of Texas at Austin researchers.

For a new book, "Life After Welfare: Reform and the Persistence of Poverty," Laura Lein and Deanna Schexnayder followed 179 families who left welfare after the welfare reform act of 1996 was signed into law.

"We examine the ways in which the effort to 'end welfare as we know it' has played out in the lives of impoverished families in Texas who draw on welfare support," said Lein, a professor in the School of Social Work and Department of Anthropology. President Bill Clinton signed a welfare law in 1996, and President George W. Bush reauthorized the bill with more stringent requirements for welfare recipients in 2006.

Lein and Schexnayder, a research scientist and associate director of the Ray Marshall Center in the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, found the families experienced barriers to employment, confronted poverty even when employed and faced a failing safety net of basic human services as they attempted to sustain low-wage jobs.

"Have these reforms—ending entitlements and moving towards time limits and work requirement—lifted Texas families once living on welfare out of poverty or merely stricken their names from the administrative rolls?" they ask.

"If the goal of welfare reform was to reduce the welfare rolls, it was undeniably successful—at least in the short term," the authors said. "But if the goal was to reduce poverty and increase the well-being and stability of families previously on welfare, the results are far more complicated and disturbing."

Texas, with its early experiments with welfare reform and a relatively limited welfare program to begin with, is an important arena in which to study the aftermath of welfare reform, said Lein and Schexnayder, adding that federal lawmakers later increased the severity of welfare reform even more.

"Through the experiences of Texas welfare leavers, we can examine the potential outcomes of similar policy initiatives in other states as budgetary constraints continue to affect welfare policies," the researchers said.

University of Texas Press published the book. Daniel Schroeder, also of the LBJ School, and Karen Douglas of Sam Houston State University, contributed to the research.

For more information, contact: [Nancy Neff](#); [Laura Lein](#), 512-471-9248.

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