



**The House of Representatives
STATE OF HAWAII
REPRESENTATIVE GENE WARD, PH.D.**

THE SHAME OF THE 2008 LEGISLATURE
“Cuts to Temporary Assistance To Needy Families is a bad public policy.”

**EDITORIAL
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“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” This is the self-help motto that has been used to guide people out of poverty all over the world, except as of late Hawaii. With the recent TANF cuts, some legislators want to hand out fish rather than empowering people to take control of their own lives by becoming self-supporting.

The majority party in the State legislature led by Budget Conference Committee, Rep. Marcus Oshiro, Chair of the Finance Committee and Sen. Roslyn Baker, Chair of Senate Ways and Means cut \$22 million out of proven job-producing, poverty-reducing programs.

Instead of being used in the community to help needy families and to prevent at-risk behavior in our youth, these leaders chose to put this \$22 million in a reserve account where it will sit idle. Hawaii already has the 4th largest reserve fund in the nation, and this legislative maneuver will only make poverty-stricken families more numerous. Reserve funds will not gain interest and once transferred, these funds can only be used for direct cash assistance and then, only for families working a certain number of hours a week.

Every October 1, the Federal Government provides Hawaii a block grant of nearly \$100 million under a program called Temporary Assistance for the Needy (TANF). These funds can be used as cash assistance to needy working families, programs that help people prepare and obtain employment and prevention programs that protect at-risk children and strengthen families. There is one caveat – once funds are designated for cash assistance, they cannot be moved to other programs. As a result, DHS allocates approximately \$45 million of these Federal funds for cash assistance and uses the remaining funds to help families break the cycle of poverty through job training programs and prevention initiatives that work with children at-risk.

Historically, the number of families receiving the work assistance payments has steadily declined since 2000, even in the worst of economic times in the aftermath of 9/11. For example, in 1999, there were over 16,000 households receiving cash assistance; last year

the caseload was approximately 6,000. These figures prove that the work training and youth at-risk programs work – fewer people need cash assistance to supplement their wages.

Yet despite protests from DHS, the minority members in the legislature and the program participants themselves, the majority on the House Finance and the Senate Ways and Means committees cut nearly one-quarter of the TANF funds from the work training and prevention programs. As a result, thousands of people will be deprived of job skills training, employment opportunities, English as a second language courses as well as dozens of other programs that have proven their ability to help Hawaii's neediest find and retain jobs. Even more troubling, thousands of children that were enrolled in various after school programs and at-risk youth programs will lose the encouragement and support these programs offer.

These programs have proven to provide the vital assistance needed to address social issues before they become tomorrow's tragedies and crises. These programs help homeless families transition to a new life. They work with single parents to find employment. They prevent teenage pregnancy, drug and substance abuse and teach life skills to students. These programs also help victims of domestic abuse and work to break the pattern of child abuse and neglect.

The padding of this reserve fund is totally senseless, inappropriate and borders on the iniquitous. These cuts are ill-timed, ill-conceived and demonstrate ignorance of TANF funding as well as a gross lack of compassion for the thousands of families struggling to break the cycle of poverty.

Chairs Oshiro and Baker, on behalf of the thousands of Hawaii's most vulnerable, "SHAME!," and on all the legislators who backed these unkind cuts to the poorest and most vulnerable among us.

Rep. Gene Ward, (R-Hawaii Kai) is a former Peace Corps Country Director and United Nations Advisor who worked in numerous poverty alleviation programs in Asia, the Pacific and Africa.

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