

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students



United States Student Association

Welfare and the LGBT Community

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families:

In 1996, former President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility Act into law. This act drastically changed the requirements for receiving public assistance by adding time limits to how long people may receive benefits, limiting benefits to single mothers, creating tougher work requirements where "work" is narrowly defined, heavily restricting benefits to immigrants, and shrinking access to education for recipients.

Welfare and the LGBT Community:

Often poverty and the debate around welfare are not considered "gay" issues. The myth of gay prosperity has been created and perpetuated in large part by the representation of LGBT people in popular culture. The image of the gay, educated, white, middle-class is shown in magazines, on television, and in the cinema. However, for many queer people living in poverty, the need for public assistance is a very real issue. Lesbian mothers, LGBT youth and elders, transgendered people, LGBT immigrants, and queer people with alcohol or drug addictions have all been deeply affected by welfare reform.

A study conducted by the Children's Defense Fund in 1999 shows that one-third of people who were forced off welfare since 1996 no longer had a job. 58% of those working earned wages that kept their families below the poverty line. The only people who were shown to break out of poverty were those with at least a two year post-secondary or vocational degree.

Queer Youth

In order for young people to receive public assistance they must either live with and be supported by their parents, or become emancipated.

- Many youth are living on the streets due to abuse in the home, lack of support, or having been thrown out because their sexual and/or gender identity was not accepted.
- To become emancipated, youth must prove that they cannot live with or be supported by their parents. This requires the cooperation of the parents often in the form of a signed letter.
- Due to abuse and lack of support, queer youth are often not willing to make contact with their parents and parents are not often willing to be supportive of emancipation making this proof difficult to obtain.

According to ABC News queer youth make up roughly one-third of homeless people in Los Angeles. According to the Hetrick-Martin Institute this number jumps to 50% in New York City.

LGBT Seniors

Older queer people living under the poverty line face a unique set of issues.

In the case of the death of a partner in a same-sex, financially dependant relationship the surviving partner is not eligible to receive many of the benefits that heterosexual, married couples receive. This includes Social Security.

Due to welfare regulations stemming from the 1996 reform, people must now use a card and an automated teller machine to access their benefits. If older people are homebound then they have to give their card and pin number to a trusted person in order to access their benefits. Many queer seniors do not have anyone in their lives who they can trust with their finances.

The Queer Economic Justice Network reports that 66% of LGBT seniors live alone, compared to 26% of the general senior population.

Transgender People and Public Assistance

For transgender people, identification cards and other information may list a birth sex that conflicts with the person's gender identity and/or expression. This makes it difficult for transgender people to receive or maintain public assistance.

In order to get the ID cards needed to apply for aid, transgender people may have to obtain paperwork from medical and mental health providers which non-trans people do not need.

Welfare recipients must dress in "proper" business attire when attending job centers and interviews. "Proper" attire means clothing that coincides with the gender on your identification. Often times this conflicts with a transgender person's gender identity and/or expression. Transgender people must then decide whether to wear clothing in which they feel uncomfortable or unnatural in, or risk losing benefits for wearing "inappropriate" clothing.

Transgender people also face high levels of harassment at workfare sites that they must visit or risk losing their benefits.

LGBT Immigrants

Only citizens of the United States can receive public assistance. Immigrants to the U.S. can receive full welfare benefits if they become legal citizens through marriage.

LGBT people can not legally marry. This means that LGBT Immigrants cannot secure full welfare benefits.

The Gay Men's Health Crisis reports that 80% of their immigrant clients who need aid do not qualify to receive public assistance.

Queer Mothers

- ◆ Parents who are on welfare may be exempt from work requirements if they have infant children. But recipients who care for other people's children are not exempt. A non-biological parent in a lesbian relationship who needs to care for her infant will not be exempt from work requirements because she is seen as caring for another's child

Women earn 76 cents for every dollar men earn. Because of this, many lesbian-headed households struggle financially.

Federal regulations do not require states to provide allowances for childcare.

The Children's Defense Fund reports that full-day child care costs between \$4,000-\$10,000 per year.

Substance Abuse and Treatment

Recipients of welfare must undergo substance abuse screening. If a person is found to be abusing substances they are mandated to recovery programs. People can be stripped of their Medicaid benefits for refusing to be screened or refusing to go into a recovery program.

The treatment agencies that the city's Human Resources Administration lists as options for those who must go into a substance abuse program are often not culturally sensitive. Many LGBT people who participate in these programs face homophobia and transphobia. For queer people whose substance abuse stems from issues with sexual orientation and gender identity, the chance of recovery in these programs is very small. Most treatment centers are not prepared to work on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and the stigma and discrimination resulting from identifying as LGBT. When LGBT people don't make it through these recovery programs or continue using, they lose their benefits.

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