

OKLAHOMA AFDC ROLLS CONTINUE TO DROP

From Okla. Dept. of Human Services

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) March figures released by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services show Oklahoma's Aid to Families with Dependent Children program caseload dropped 1.7 percent from February and 14 percent from March one year ago, a state official has said.

"We hope these are good signs that there really is improvement in the Oklahoma economy and that more citizens who once needed help are finding jobs and becoming self-sufficient," said DHS Director George S. Miller. "I know our staff has been working with new clients from day one to let them know that AFDC is a short-term, temporary solution to a family's financial crisis. We want clients to know we're putting our energies into helping them find work and becoming independent."

"We are going to serve all who are eligible for public assistance. That's our mission as public servants, but we also have a mission to help people help themselves. We

have to believe the efforts our staff have put into reforming Oklahoma's welfare system through job training, education, job placement and other supportive efforts have contributed to a steady decline in the AFDC rolls."

In March, AFDC rolls dropped to 39,272 cases with 106,164 persons in the caseload, of which 75,003 were children under age 19. That compares to 39,956 cases in February, with 108,237 persons in the caseload, of which

76,324 were children. In March 1995, there were 45,674 AFDC cases, with 125,918 persons in the caseload, of which 87,006 were children.

While the drop in AFDC rolls creates a cost savings for Oklahoma, Miller said it would be in the best interest of the program to apply some of those savings to a continuing effort to find ways to put people to work. "At some point, we will get those who have the fewest skills and abilities to work and it will take a more valiant effort on the part of

our workers to help these individuals."

Although each AFDC grant has to have an adult payee, Miller said staff is reminded the program has been designed since it started in 1936 to serve the children and they (the staff) should do what they can to help parents and guardians (the adult payees) get on their feet to do just that—feed and help their dependent children.

Health care, child care and transportation are still large stumbling blocks for many of these families. "And we shouldn't overlook the number one reason why most of these families come to us for help," Miller said. "It's the absent parents' failure to pay court-ordered child support to care for the children they helped bring into this world. Our staff, along with contracted services from district attorneys and community action agencies, are really working to get a handle on getting absent parents to pay."

"We want clients to know we're putting our energies into helping them find work and becoming independent."

George S. Miller

"Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him."

Aldous Huxley

Reverse, continued from page 2

into the regular prison system. Currently, offenders in OJA custody are released at 18, though petitions may be made to hold the youth until age 19 if they are considered a threat or untreatable.

The bill's House author, Rep. Jari Askins, D-Duncan, said the reversed certification should be examined.

"Violent crime is being committed by younger citizens," she said. "Whether we need to change the law to try those people as adults — that needs more study."

The bill also creates the Alternative School Program, a residential facility aimed at 12 to 17 year-olds who are at risk of "penetrating deeper into the juvenile justice system."

OJA officials are uncertain how much the new facility will cost. Final figures will depend on exactly what type of facility it will be. A 24-hour, secured facility, Byram said, will cost considerably more.

"Obviously," Kerr said, "from looking at statistics, criminals are getting younger."

He said the provision would give courts the opportunity to look at each case individually. "It would give them the ability to say, 'this person is still a child.'"

