



# Welfare

- 1 The call to be a “neighbor” – to help those who are in need – is addressed to all people and all institutions. Receiving assistance should enable those in need to reach or return to self-sufficiency and be in a position to help others.
- 2 Whether, and to what extent, government should render assistance to those in need depends on the nature of the need and the responsibilities of other institutions.
- 3 As part of its calling to promote public justice, government bears responsibility to guard against the emergence of intractable poverty in society and to ensure that appropriate and effective steps are taken to address such poverty.
- 4 Government’s main way of addressing poverty should be preventive:
  - By upholding a just society that includes the protection of civil rights and responsibilities
  - By ensuring access to effective education, good health care, and decent housing
  - By fostering conditions for a healthy economy
- 5 As part of its responsibility to uphold a just society, government must protect and promote a thriving social sector to help meet diverse welfare needs. Government should fulfill its welfare responsibility in part by underwriting the work of non-government organizations (NGOs), which are close to the needs and devoted to alleviating them.
- 6 The nation’s welfare obligations do not rest with NGOs alone, because people in dire poverty need help even when their neighbors are not generous or when economic conditions restrict private charity. Moreover, need and wealth are often found in different places. For these reasons, government will at times have to act in ways that go beyond preventive measures and the support of NGOs, for it must address critical conditions that endanger the welfare of society as a whole.
- 7 When government does partner with NGOs, it must protect their autonomy and diversity. Many of the NGOs that provide welfare assistance are forthrightly faith-based. In keeping with the First Amendment, government must not discriminate against such groups. Instead, it should grant faith-based organizations the same opportunities offered to all other service groups and protect their distinctive religious character if they become its partners. Government can best honor the religious liberty of persons and families that need public welfare assistance by ensuring that a variety of providers with different philosophies of assistance are available.

## Implications

1. Public welfare assistance must not substitute for, but rather supplement and be coordinated with, help rendered by family, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers. Through means such as temporary income maintenance payments, Earned Income Tax Credit, and food stamps, it is legitimate and at times necessary for government to provide financial assistance to persons and families unable to earn sufficient income on their own. However, government does not very effectively provide the kind of direct personal services that promote self-sufficiency, particularly when obstacles are deeply rooted.
2. Welfare should be designed as temporary assistance, not as long-term income maintenance. It should include both incentives to promote self-sufficiency and disincentives to an ongoing reliance on welfare.
3. The financial assistance and services provided to individuals and families should be generous and effective, not stingy and second-rate.
4. The design, funding, and delivery of welfare should be decentralized, with a national floor, to maximize the match between the pattern of needs in various localities and the resources of government and non-government organizations (NGOs) in those places.
5. Charitable Choice, which establishes equitable conditions for government partnerships with faith-based social services, including safeguards for the religious liberty of recipients, should be extended to all federal, state, and local social spending.

## For Further Reading

Carlson-Thies, Stanley W. "Charitable Choice: Bringing Religion Back into American Welfare," in *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Policy in America*, edited by Hugh Heclo and Wilfred M. McClay. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, pp. 269-297.

Carlson-Thies, Stanley W. *Charitable Choice for Welfare & Community Services: An Implementation Guide for State, Local, and Federal Officials*. Center for Public Justice, 2000.

Carlson-Thies, Stanley W. and James W. Skillen, eds. *Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis*. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

Donaldson, Dave and Stanley W. Carlson-Thies. *A Revolution of Compassion: Faith-Based Groups As Full Partners in Fighting America's Social Problems*. Baker Books, 2003.

Sherman, Amy. *The Charitable Choice Handbook for Ministry Leaders*. Center for Public Justice, 2001.

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