# Setting the Baseline:

# Child Welfare Entries among AFDC Exiters

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# Executive Summary

Drawing on a rich body of administrative data, this report provides Maryland policy-makers with baseline information on the relationship between welfare exits and child welfare entries under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. The analysis gives an empirical starting point against which data describing child welfare entries among children who formerly received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) can be assessed. Without this information we would be hard-pressed to determine accurately the impacts of welfare reform, if any, on child welfare. Key findings are:

The typical case exiting AFDC consists of a two-person assistance unit, composed of a female (94.1%), African American (55.2%) mother and her one (51.2%) child. In an average case, the mother is 31.6 years old and the youngest child is five years old. In one third of the cases, the youngest child is under three.

The most common reason for AFDC case closure was increased income or starting work (34.6%), and, typically, the family was exiting from a cash assistance spell of approximately 16 months. The majority of cases (69.2%) were able to remain off AFDC for at least 12 months.

Very few AFDC dependents became known to the child welfare system within one year of exiting cash assistance. Less than one percent of children became involved with foster care, kinship care, or intensive family services. Only 2.2% became known to child protective services for reasons of abuse or neglect.

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## Introduction to the *Setting the Baseline* Series

For nearly 20 years the University of Maryland School of Social Work (SSW) has partnered with the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) to conduct studies on the State s welfare and child support programs. The partnership is one of the nation s oldest and is truly collaborative in nature. Three commonalities tie the research program together. First, all studies are designed and conducted to provide Maryland policymakers with state-level (and often county-level) empirical data which are used to inform policy development, program management and program monitoring and evaluation.

Second, all studies rely to some extent on the use of administrative data which provide a great deal of information at a relatively low cost. Their use allows the state to save more costly research methods such as surveys and interviews for gathering additional information not available in administrative data.

Finally, studies conducted through the SSW-DHR partnership are often longitudinal, sometimes spanning as long as a decade or more. The longitudinal character of the studies allows critical issues such as the extent of lifetime welfare receipt to be addressed with more comprehensive data than is typically available in cross-sectional research or survey designs with limited data collection points.

Numerous reports have resulted from partnership studies over the years (e.g. Born, 1992, 1994; Born, Caudill, and Cordero, 1998, 1999, 2000; Caudill and Born, 1997; Born and Kunz, 1990; Ovwigho, 2001; Welfare and Child Support Policy Research and Training Group, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001). Enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P. L. 104

-193) and the bipartisan state-level Welfare Innovation Acts of the past few years, Maryland s implementation of its TANF program (Family Investment Program, FIP), and the resulting radical changes in public welfare programs have added new salience and importance to the joint SSW - DHR research endeavor.

Paradoxically, welfare reform does not just require studies to look at the effects of new program features or to examine the characteristics of users of redesigned cash assistance programs. It also requires re-examining data collected under the old welfare system to establish pre-reform baselines in such key areas as child welfare and welfare participation patterns. Absent these baselines, it would be difficult if not impossible to determine the true effects of welfare reform accurately.

Because of the decades-old SSW-DHR partnership, Maryland is fortunate to have a rich body of empirical data from which these needed baselines can be constructed. Using pre-reform AFDC data, a series of *Setting the Baseline* reports provides our state with empirical starting points against which post-reform findings (TANF outcomes) can be assessed. The first *Baseline* report focused on the critical question of recidivism, or returns to the welfare rolls (Born, Caudill & Cordero, 1998). Today s second *Setting the Baseline* report focuses on the pre-reform relationship between exits from AFDC and entries into the child welfare system. Specifically, pre-reform child welfare entry patterns for families leaving AFDC in Maryland are examined over a one-year post-exit period, and characteristics of cases leaving AFDC are discussed.

**Introduction**

Radical changes in welfare policy in the last five years have significant implications for low-income families with children. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 ended the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, the largest means-tested cash transfer program for poor families. AFDC has been replaced by Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and the open-ended entitlement to cash assistance has been eliminated. Among other things, TANF denies cash assistance for families in which an adult has received assistance for five years in his or her lifetime, includes strict work requirements, and permits strong sanctions for non-compliance with program requirements.

A number of child welfare advocates suggested that TANF provisions such as these would negatively affect the well-being of poor and near-poor children. For example, the Urban Institute estimated that TANF would push 1.1 million children into poverty (Zedlewski, Clark, Meier, & Watson, 1996). Because of the importance of the issue, a number of states (e.g. Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York) have included child well-being and/or child welfare components in their TANF evaluations. So far there has been no empirical confirmation that these dire predictions have come true. For example, the most recent Maryland report found that virtually no former TANF children entered foster care (93 of 12,041, 0.77%) or kinship care (78 of 12,041, 0.65%) in the first year after leaving welfare (Welfare and Child Support Research and Training Group, 2000).

Although our Maryland study shows results that do not reflect the dire outcomes some child welfare advocates anticipated, a lack of comparable research under the old

AFDC system limits the interpretation of emerging TANF and child welfare/foster care data. Only with baseline empirical data on the rate at which former AFDC children entered child welfare can we truly determine whether the rates of entry being observed under TANF are lower, higher, or about the same as historical rates. This report seeks to fill this important gap in information for Maryland. Using administrative data, it describes the pre-reform relationship between exits from AFDC and entries into the child welfare system.

**Background**

Foster care involves less than 1% of the Maryland child population at any given time, with fewer than 10,000 children in care (MDHR-SSA, 1998). Foster and kinship care caseloads increased in Maryland between 1992 and 2000, but more recently have been decreasing (MDHR-SSA Monthly Management Reports). Welfare reform may or may not be contributing to this new trend.

The Historical Relationship between AFDC and Foster Care

To understand and interpret the post-reform pattern in terms of welfare exits and child welfare entries, some appreciation for the historical relationship between foster care and welfare is required. Historically, a disproportionately large percentage of children in foster care came from families that were income-eligible for AFDC (now TANF). To illustrate, in 1995, there were 483,000 children in foster care nationwide. Of those children, 260,737 (54%), were AFDC-eligible. In contrast, nationally, only 14.2% of families with children were receiving AFDC (U. S. House of Representatives, 1998).

Children are at greater risk for entry into foster care if their parents possess specific characteristics.[1] These characteristics include familial poverty (e.g. Daro, 1988; Giovannoni & Billingsley, 1970; Jones & McCurdy, 1992; Wolock & Horowitz, 1979), low parental education and employment status (Emlen, Lahti, Downs, McKay, & Downs, 1978; Gruber, 1978), and African American racial heritage (Courtney, 1994; Courtney, Barth, Berrick, Brooks, Needell, & Park, 1996). Notably, these are the same characteristics often associated with heightened risk of welfare receipt.

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[1]Much of the empirical literature on foster care is dated. Also, many issues have yet to be researched.

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## Possible Effects of PRWORA's Welfare Changes to Foster Care

In addition to direct changes PRWORA made to the foster care system, there are possible indirect effects through its TANF provisions. PRWORA s main welfare provisions with potential consequences for children and their caretakers are the requirement that adult caseheads participate in work activities after two years of benefit receipt and the five-year lifetime limit on cash assistance receipt. Two possible consequences of TANF s provisions are explored below.

First, it has been estimated that enforcement of TANF's two-year work requirements may affect as much as 37 to 59% of the AFDC caseload (Duncan, Harris, & Boisjoly, 1997). Non-compliance with work participation leads to benefit reduction, or, in a number of states including Maryland, to termination of the entire family s cash assistance. In addition, TANF s five year limit on benefit receipt will affect all families, with only a few exceptions. Benefit reduction or elimination through either avenue may place economic hardship on the family and increase children s risk for neglect.

Second, stress and child abuse have been empirically linked (e.g. McMurtry, 1985; Rodriguez & Green, 1997); PRWORA may increase stress by requiring family members to work. Coping with the unpredictable labor market, transportation, child care, or the cessation of TANF benefits due to sanctioning or time limits may push some parents toward maltreating their children (Collins & Aber, 1997). Child maltreatment could, in turn, increase Child Protective Services involvement leading to foster care placement among these families.

In reality, little is known about the relationship between exiting AFDC (or TANF) and subsequent child welfare involvement. Nonetheless, it is critical to have a point of comparison against which to assess the exit/entry phenomenon under TANF. As noted, without a baseline for comparison, Maryland is unable to know or convincingly demonstrate that the implementation of welfare reform does or does not correlate with increased disruption in the living situations of children. Empirically demonstrating causality is complex and beyond the scope of this study. However, although our report does not explore causal relationships between AFDC exits and child welfare entries, it does provide a much needed historical baseline to which TANF-era findings can be compared.

## Methodology

### Sample

In order to determine the historical rate at which children entered child welfare after their families exited welfare, administrative data were analyzed for a sample of children who left AFDC in Maryland between October 1994 and September 1995. Selecting this pre-reform year (October 1994    September 1995) as the baseline period was a rational decision.  This particular year was chosen because it is early enough that discussions of welfare reform probably did not influence exits from cash assistance. Further, this was not an atypical year.  Unemployment rates appear consistent with years before and after, and there were no major changes in welfare or child welfare policies that might have somehow changed entrance or exit rates for welfare or foster care (MDHR-SSA, 1998).  Finally, foster care and AFDC caseload trends were not unusual during that year, when compared with years before and after.

Applying standard scientific procedures (95% confidence interval, with 5% acceptable error rate and correction for finite sample) to a universe of 33,819 cases exiting AFDC between October 1994 and September 1995, a sample size of 373 cases was determined to be needed to permit AFDC to child welfare transitions to be measured reliably.

Families exiting from AFDC-Basic (one or no adult) and AFDC-Unemployed (two parents) comprised the sample.  Because children were our focus, child-only cases were not excluded.

Some cases were excluded however.  We eliminated cases where the dependents were 17 or older, as these children would not be eligible to enter foster

care during the entire one-year follow-up period.  Also excluded were cases where the family s AFDC case closed because they moved out of Maryland.[2]

From the universe of cases meeting the selection criteria (n = 33,819), a random sample of 373 cases was drawn.  This sample is representative of the universe of cases leaving AFDC during the study period (October 1994 - September 1995) in terms of the month of exit and jurisdiction, as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, following.  The 643 former child recipients included in these closed cases were tracked for a period of 12 months following the cash assistance case closure.

**Table 1.**

**Number of AFDC Cases Closed per Month**

| Month | Universe | Study Cases | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| October 1994 | 2,922 | 43 | 1.47% |
| November 1994 | 2,985 | 31 | 1.04% |
| December 1994 | 2,775 | 28 | 1.01% |
| January 1995 | 2,797 | 34 | 1.22% |
| February 1995 | 2,525 | 25 | 0.99% |
| March 1995 | 2,907 | 32 | 1.10% |
| April 1995 | 2,987 | 23 | 0.77% |
| May 1995 | 2,659 | 37 | 1.39% |
| June 1995 | 3,067 | 40 | 1.30% |
| July 1995 | 2,697 | 25 | 0.93% |
| August 1995 | 2,614 | 27 | 1.03% |
| September 1995 | 2,884 | 28 | 0.97% |
| **Total All Months** | **33,819** | **373** | **1.10%** |

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[2]For obvious reasons, we also excluded cases where the reason for the AFDC exit was removal/departure of the only eligible child from the case.

**Table 2.**

**Number of Study Cases per Jurisdiction**

| Jurisdiction | Universe | Study Cases | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Allegany County | 827 | 11 | 1.33% |
| Anne Arundel County | 1,249 | 14 | 1.12% |
| Baltimore County | 3,922 | 36 | 0.92% |
| Calvert County | 303 | 5 | 1.65% |
| Caroline County | 282 | 3 | 1.06% |
| Carroll County | 519 | 7 | 1.35% |
| Cecil County | 708 | 11 | 1.55% |
| Charles County | 811 | 11 | 1.36% |
| Dorchester County | 487 | 7 | 1.44% |
| Frederick County | 835 | 11 | 1.32% |
| Garrett County | 225 | 2 | 0.89% |
| Harford County | 1,098 | 16 | 1.46% |
| Howard County | 672 | 9 | 1.34% |
| Kent County | 151 | 3 | 1.99% |
| Montgomery County | 2,389 | 35 | 1.47% |
| Prince Georges County | 4,939 | 54 | 1.09% |
| Queen Annes County | 221 | 2 | 0.91% |
| St. Marys County | 628 | 5 | 0.80% |
| Somerset County | 362 | 4 | 1.11% |
| Talbot County | 271 | 4 | 1.48% |
| Washington County | 1,039 | 14 | 1.35% |
| Wicomico County | 1,008 | 11 | 1.09% |
| Worcester County | 420 | 6 | 1.43% |
| Baltimore City | 10,453 | 92 | 0.88% |
| **Total for All Jurisdictions** | **33,819** | **373** | **1.10%** |

## Data Sources

The data analyzed in this report were collected from three administrative data

sources.  For each casehead and child recipient, data on their public assistance and

social service utilization, as well as case and individual characteristics, were gathered

from the Automated Information Management System (AIMS)/Automated Master File

(AMF), the Client Automated Resource and Eligibility System (CARES), and the

Services database.  Use of these automated systems allows us to follow clients using

original case numbers and other identifying information so that child welfare and AFDC

receipt could be tracked, even if sample members moved to different jurisdictions within Maryland during the study period.

## Analysis

Analysis focused on case and member characteristics, as well as utilization of services (AFDC and Child Welfare).  A total of 18 variables were examined.

Characteristics of Exiting Cases
"      assistance unit size
"      number of adults on the case
"      number of children on the case
"      case closure reason
"      length of AFDC spell before exit
"      total time on AFDC over last 5 years
"      payee s returns to AFDC

Characteristics of Exiting Case Heads
"      gender
"      racial/ethnic group
"      age at AFDC exit

Characteristics of Exiting Children
"      gender
"      racial/ethnic group
"      age at AFDC exit
"      relationship to case head

The two questions of interest are:

"      Did the child enter foster care, kinship care, or intensive family services in the year following the AFDC case closure?

"      Were investigations of child abuse or neglect opened, and indicated or confirmed, for any of the children in the year following the AFDC case closure?

The next chapter describes the characteristics of study cases and the results of our analyses.

**Findings**

    This chapter presents data on the characteristics of sample cases as well as findings on child welfare entries among former AFDC children.  Although separate bullets  detail the characteristics of these cases, it is illuminating to consider what a typical pre-reform (October 1994 through September 1995) exiting case looks like. Typically, a case in our AFDC exiters sample consists of a two-person family, composed of a female (94.1%), African American (55.2%) mother and her one (51.2%) child.  In an average case, the mother is 31 years old and the youngest child on the case is five years old.  In fully one third of the cases, the youngest child is under three. Specific findings with regard to case and client characteristics are presented in list form on the following pages and in Tables 3-7, following.

<u>Characteristics of Cases</u>

    Assistance units range from one to seven people. The average assistance unit size is 2.67 people; the median and mode are two-person assistance units.

    The majority of cases (n = 306, or 82.0%) include one adult.  Two adults are included in approximately five percent (n = 19 or 5.1%) of closing cases, and 12.9% cases (n = 48) do not include any adults.

    Just over half of the AFDC cases (n = 191 or 51.2%) have one child, with an additional 29.8% (n = 111) containing two children.  The maximum number of children on any case is five.

    The mean age of the youngest child is 5.64 years, and the median is 4.40 years.

**Table 3.**

**Characteristics of Study Cases**

| Characteristics of Cases | Percent (Number) |
|---|---|
| Assistance unit size | |
| Mean | 2.67 |
| Median | 2.00 |
| St. Dev. | 1.10 |
| Range | 1   7 |
| Adults on case | |
| 0 (Child-Only Cases) | 12.9% (48) |
| 1 | 82.0% (306) |
| 2 | 5.1% (19) |
| Children on case | |
| 1 | 51.2% (191) |
| 2 | 29.8% (111) |
| 3 | 13.1% (49) |
| 4 or more | 5.9% (22) |
| Age of youngest child | |
| Mean | 5.64 |
| Median | 4.40 |
| Std. Dev. | 4.34 |
| Range | .05   16.99 |

<u>Welfare Experiences</u>

To shed some light on why families left AFDC, we examine case closing reasons recorded in the administrative data.  As noted in the *Life After Welfare* reports, great caution must be exercised when interpreting these administratively-documented reasons for case closure, primarily because pre-set codes may be an incomplete representation of the often complex realities behind families  departures from welfare. In addition, two separate automated systems (AIMS/AMF and CARES) were in use between August 1993 and March 1998, with similar, but not identical sets of closing codes.  With these caveats in mind, we present the following case information:

The largest number of cases closed due to increased income or starting work (n = 129, 34.6%). The second and third most common case closing reasons were failure to reapply for benefits (n = 91, 24.4%) and failure to provide eligibility information (n = 65, 17.4%). The next most frequent closure was at the client s request (n = 40, 10.7%); 18 cases (4.8%) closed due to verification problems pertaining to the child or the child leaving the household. These five reasons accounted for more than nine of every 10 case closures.

The length of the welfare spell that brought the case into our sample averaged 15.9 months, with a range of one month to 60 months. About three in five (n = 227, 60.9%) had been on for 12 or fewer months, with a median for the entire sample of 8.7 months.

During the five years preceding their welfare exit, caseheads averaged 24.1 months on welfare as an adult; the range was from one month to 60 months.

The majority of cases did not return to cash assistance within 12 months (69.2%, n = 258).

**Table 4.**

**Welfare Experience of Study Cases**

| Welfare Experience | Percent (Number) |
|---|---|
| Top 5 Case Closing Reasons | |
|   Income above Limit/Started Work | 34.6% (129) |
|   Certification/ No Redetermination | 24.4% (91) |
|   Eligibility/Verification not provided | 17.4% (65) |
|   Client Requested Closure | 10.7% (40) |
|   Not Eligible | 4.8% (18) |
| Length of Welfare Spell | |
|   12 months or less | 60.9% (227) |
|   13-24 months | 19.8% (74) |
|   25-36 months | 6.7% (25) |
|   37-48 months | 2.7% (10) |
|   49-60 months | 9.9% (37) |
| | |
|   Mean (months) | 15.9 |
|   Median | 8.7 |
|   Standard Deviation | 16.7 |
|   Range | .2 - 60.0 |
| Total Time on Welfare as Casehead during Last Five Years | |
|   12 months or less | 35.9% (134) |
|   13-24 months | 19.0% (71) |
|   25-36 months | 13.4% (50) |
|   37-48 months | 7.5% (28) |
|   49-60 months | 24.1% (90) |
| | |
|   Mean (months) | 24.1 |
|   Median | 18.0 |
|   Standard Deviation | 19.1 |
|   Range | .4 - 60.0 |
| Recidivism | |
|   Did Not Return | 69.2% (258) |
|   Returned within 30 days | 11.8% (44) |
|   Returned within 31 days to 90 days | 6.1% (23) |
|   Returned within 91 days to 6 months | 5.9% (22) |
|   Returned within 7 to 12 months | 7.0% (26) |

<u>Characteristics of Adults</u>

The vast majority of payees (n = 351, 94.0%) were female.

Over half of pre-reform exiting payees (n = 206 or 56.6%) were African American,

two-fifths (40.1%, n = 146) were Caucasian, and persons of Latino (n = 7) and Asian

(n = 5) descent comprised fewer than two percent each.  Data on ethnic origin was

missing for 2.4% (n = 9) of our sample.

The mean age of the exiting payees was 31.60 years and the median was 29.86

years.  Among sample cases, payees ranged in age from 18 to 76 years.

**Table 5.**

**Characteristics of Adult Case Heads of Study Cases**

| **Characteristics of Adults** | **Percent (Number) of Adults** |
|---|---|
| Gender <br> % with female heads of household | 94.1% (351) |
| Racial/Ethnic Group <br> % African American heads of household <br> % with Caucasian heads of household | <br> 56.6% (206) <br> 40.1% (146) |
| Age of payee <br> Mean <br> Median <br> Std. Dev. <br> Range | <br> 31.60 <br> 29.86 <br> 9.09 <br> 18.01   76.27 |

<u>Characteristics of Children</u>

There were 643 children in the sample, approximately half female (n = 319, 49.7%)

and half male (n = 323, 50.3%).

Over half the children were African American (n = 357, 56.6%), and two fifths (n =

250, 39.6%) were Caucasian.  Children of Latino descent comprised 1.7% (n = 11)

of the group, and Asian children (n = 13) were 2.1%.

The mean age of all children in these cases was 7.04 years, and the median was 6.29 years. Children ranged in age from less than one month to almost seventeen years.[3]

The overwhelming majority of sample youngsters were the children of the casehead (94.6%, n = 610). The remaining children were siblings, grandchildren, foster children, or otherwise related to the caseheads.

**Table 6.**

**Characteristics of Children on Study Cases**

| Characteristics of Children | Percent (Number) of Children |
|---|---|
| Gender | |
| Female | 49.7% (319) |
| Male | 50.3% (323) |
| Racial/Ethnic Group | |
| % African American | 56.6% (357) |
| % Caucasian | 39.6% (250) |
| % Asian | 2.1% (13) |
| % Latino | 1.7% (11) |
| Age | |
| Mean | 7.04 |
| Median | 6.29 |
| Std. Dev. | 4.49 |
| Range | .05   16.99 |
| Relationship to casehead | |
| Biological Child | 94.1% (604) |
| Other | 5.9% (38) |

[3]Readers are reminded that the sample was restricted to children who were under 17 at the time of exit from AFDC to allow for the one-year follow-up period.

This section discusses the utilization of foster care, kinship care, intensive family services, and indicated/confirmed child abuse and neglect investigations after the families exits from AFDC. The table below summarizes, and the text following details the findings.

**Table 7.**

**Social Services Utilization of Study Cases at One Year after Exit**

| Type of Social Service | Children affected | Cases affected |
|---|---|---|
| Foster Care<br>  Number affected/Total (%) | 4/643 (0.62%) | 4/373 (1.07%) |
| Kinship Care<br>  Number affected/Total (%) | 1/643 (0.16%) | 1/373 (0.27%) |
| Intensive Family Services<br>  Number affected/Total (%) | 1/643 (0.16%) | 1/373 (0.27%) |
| Child Abuse/Neglect Investigations<br>  Number affected/Total (%) | 14/643 (2.18%) | 11/373 (2.95%) |

Only four children entered foster care within one year of exiting welfare. All four children were from different cases. One of the 643 youngsters entered foster care within three months after AFDC case closing; two more entered by the six-month follow-up point. One additional child entered foster care by the one year post-exit point.[4]

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[4]Two of the children stayed in foster care for one month, two for two months, and one for twelve months.

Similarly, very few children entered kinship care.  Only one child entered kinship care within three months of their AFDC case closing.[5]  No additional children entered during the next nine months.

Only one of the 643 children received Intensive Family Services (IFS) during the first year after leaving welfare. Services did not begin until after the six-month follow-up point, and the service episode lasted four months.

Investigations of child abuse or neglect were opened for two children within three months of their AFDC case closing.  Within six months, investigations had been initiated for seven youngsters.  At the one-year follow-up point, investigations had been activated for a total of 14 (2.2%) of the 643 children in our sample cases.[6]  The 14 children came from eleven different families.

There are a few notable commonalities among the 18 children[7] who entered the child welfare system during the one-year follow up period.  First, all children are the biological children of the casehead of their exiting AFDC case.  Second, the majority were girls (72.2%, n = 13).  Third, the vast majority of the children were of African American descent (88.9%, n = 16).  There was no noticeable pattern with the age of the children (range, .71 years - 15.39 years; mean 7.35 years, mode 5.96 years, standard deviation 4.40 years).

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[5]The child stayed in kinship care for seven months.

[6]We counted only investigations that were ruled confirmed or indicated.  We excluded any cases when the abuse or neglect was ruled out or unsubstantiated.

[7]Two children entered two different types of services; they are counted separately in the above table but are counted only once here.

## Summary and Conclusion

Drawing on a rich body of administrative data, this report provides state and local officials with baseline information on the relationship between welfare exits and child welfare entries, an important issue in the new world of welfare reform. This baseline information is needed to assess if the patterns under the old welfare system (AFDC) are similar to or different from those being observed under TANF. A synopsis of our findings follows:

The typical case in our pre-reform sample is a two-person family, composed of a female (94.1%), African American (55.2%) mother and her one (51.2%) child. In an average case, the mother is 31.6 years old and the youngest child on the case is five years old. In one third of the cases, the youngest child is under three.

Most cases in our sample closed due to increased income or starting work (34.6%), and were exiting from a cash assistance spell of approximately 16 months. The majority of cases (69.2%) did not return to welfare within one year after exiting.

Very few pre-reform dependents became known to the child welfare system within one year of exiting cash assistance. Less than one percent of children became involved with foster care, kinship care, or intensive family services. Only 2.18% became known to child protective services for reasons of indicated or confirmed abuse or neglect.

Although low-income children tend to be disproportionately involved with the child welfare system, very few of our sample children were. Thus we conclude that in Maryland, before welfare reform, there seems to have been be no direct link between

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leaving cash assistance and entering child welfare.  These data set the pre-welfare reform baseline.  Without baseline data we would be hard-pressed to determine accurately the impacts of welfare reform, if any, on child welfare.

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