

# THE PLAIN DEALER

## Why welfare is not a sweet deal in Ohio: editorial

By **Editorial Board**

August 28

A report published recently by the libertarian Cato Institute think tank warns that it's "possible to over-generalize from ...[welfare] statistics." Then the report proceeds to do just that.

The kernel of Cato's argument in the report, "**The Work versus Welfare Trade-Off: 2013**," is that "for many" Americans on public assistance, welfare is a better deal, financially, than working because "welfare pays more than the type of entry-level job that a typical welfare recipient can expect to find."

The big-picture answer to that, of course, is to boost people's education and job prospects. But data marshaled by Ohio critics of the Cato study demonstrate that if, in fact, any Ohioans do live on Easy Street, those men and women aren't poor Ohioans.

For example, as the liberal think tank **Policy Matters Ohio points out**, one program in the stack of welfare programs Cato totals to estimate a typical benefit package is Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

But Policy Matters also notes that the share of families receiving TANF is comparatively tiny. And those families that do qualify typically only benefit for short periods. (Ohio has a three-year benefit limit.)

What's more, of the 133,000-odd Ohioans who do receive cash assistance (that represents only 1.2 percent of all Ohioans, incidentally), almost 108,000 are children, **according to the Athens County Department of Job and Family Services**. (The Athens County department prepared a response to the Cato report.) Also, according to the department, the average monthly TANF benefit is \$184. And the number of Ohio cash assistance

clients has dropped “more than 50 percent in less than two years.” As for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – commonly called food stamps – 40 percent of its clients are children.

On one point, the Athens County department and Cato concur: “We do agree with Cato on the fact that the real value of cash benefits in Ohio” – adjusted for inflation – “has dropped by 20 percent since 1995.”

If, as Cato implies, too many Ohioans are opting for welfare rather than work because Ohio offers welfare clients such a sweet deal, that would mean that Republicans -- who have run the General Assembly and governor’s office for most of the last 20 years -- let that happen. And that’s no more believable than the Cato report’s generalizations.