

The Capitol Record Since 1906

Volume #49, Report #100 -- Monday, May 24, 2010

Wealthy Suburbs Seeing Welfare Increase

The assumption that welfare recipients are shiftless ne'er-do-wells who congregate in the state's urban centers is a stereotype that continues to move further from the truth, Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed told Gongwer News Service on Monday and is hoping to tell the rest of the state.

While the largest portion of the state's various assistance caseloads still reside in Detroit, a growing portion of those cases are coming from Bloomfield Hills and Dearborn Heights, Mr. Ahmed said.

There are still only 194 food assistance cases in Bloomfield Hills, but that's a 118 percent increase from July 2008. Medicaid cases in the community have increased 37 percent to 276 over the same period.

"One big myth is the growth is only in poor and urban areas," Mr. Ahmed said. "The biggest spike is in places like Bloomfield Hills and Dearborn Heights. ... The need has moved much more into what were affluent and working class areas. You're seeing people lose their homes, seeing people lose their jobs."

A growing proportion of particularly food assistance recipients are also working, he said. "The majority of people who receive food assistance do work, but they work in jobs that don't pay enough to pay the food bills," he said.

Mr. Ahmed said he is hoping the message, aimed at the general population of the state, will make its way back to legislators trying to cut the programs or the number of caseworkers administering them.

"Michigan never needed these programs more," he said.

And he said they are being administered as efficiently as possible. "Michigan is one of the top states in the country that goes after and prosecutes and wins fraud cases. We think we're damned efficient given the numbers that we meet."

Mr. Ahmed said in a way he is also hoping the discussions he is planning with community groups around the state will help to boost recipient numbers.

"We're also really trying to undermine these myths and stereotypes that keep people from applying for these programs," he said. "The people applying for these programs have worked all their life and so should expect to receive these programs without derision or fear."

He said the state could see another 530,000 cases in the next six months as unemployment benefits again begin to expire.