

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Chatham County
By Dr. Deil S. Wright

In October 1997 the Chatham County Board of Commissioners optimistically chose to be an “Electing County” for purposes of Welfare Reform under the provisions of N.C. law (passed in August 1997). This decision occurred in the context of a multifaceted debate in the General Assembly and across the State over second-order devolution, or the granting of greater discretion, authority, and autonomy to counties in implementing national-state-local policies regarding welfare (Work First).

The Chatham County Board made its choice based on a set of expectations and an awareness of risks associated with the decision. Neither the high expectations nor the adverse risks linked to the Board’s choice have been realized. The County anticipated both more funds and more flexible fund usage. These two financial dimensions of welfare reform have not occurred, at least from the Board (and County Manager’s) point of view. No new or more flexible monies have accrued to the County, but neither a fiscal crisis nor adverse fallout resulted from a fixed-dollar block grant allocation to the county for welfare purposes.

Administratively the Board expected substantial flexibility in how welfare (Work First) would be implemented. Streamlining organizational structures and securing more integrated or coordinated delivery of human and social services was anticipated. There has been some enhanced cooperation among human service agencies, non-profits, and community groups, but these relationships fall significantly short of the optimistic expectations prevalent in 1997. As one key actor observed, “The momentum has been lost but the vision is still there.” To regain the initiative the Board has asked legislators representing the County to introduce a local bill in the 2001 General Assembly allowing the Board to merge all human services into a single agency.

Since National and State legislation placed Welfare Reform high on the public agenda of North Carolina counties in 1996 and 1997, five major developments have occurred in Chatham County. First, there has been a continued decline in the welfare (Work First) rolls, a decrease that started in 1996 and has continued to the present. Second, there has been a significant drop in the attention, visibility, and prominence of welfare reform. Third, a major culture shift has occurred within the social service agency regarding roles, mission, tasks, and skills. Fourth, there has been an increase in the networks among agencies aimed at coordination in the delivery of social services.

Fifth and finally, state to local devolution has been marginal or modest at best. Changes have been much closer to a slow evolution than a devolution revolution. Unrealized local expectations have engendered no small amount of dissatisfaction with the State generally and with state agencies in particular.

Table 5

**CHATHAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:
EXPENDITURES (TOTAL AND NET) AND FTE EMPLOYEES, FY 2000**

	Total	Net	Employees
	<u>Outlays*</u>	<u>Outlays**</u>	<u>(FTE)</u>
	(000s of dollars)		
Administration	218	206	5
Adult Services	327	259	8
Child Protective Services	558	414	10
Child Support	412	46	8
Day Care	1,536	34	0
Emergency Assistance	56	22	0
Food Stamps	279	94	7
Foster Care	1,154	709	7
Medicaid	1,804	1,489	10
Special Assistance	479	466	1
Work First	<u>334</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>8</u>
TOTAL	7,157	3,823	64

*Includes intergovernmental financial aid.

**Expenditures from county own-source revenues.

Source: Chatham County Budget, Fiscal Year 2000-2001.