

Executive Summary
Pender County
By Dr. Thomas J. Barth

Pender County chose to remain a standard county because the perceived risks of electing status outweighed the benefits. They were satisfied that they could accomplish what they wanted under the standard plan, and were not convinced they had the capacity to take advantage of the innovations afforded by electing status.

Assessments of the Work First program are mixed. The DSS Director is pleased with the reductions in the welfare rolls (down 73%), centralization of social services staff (which has provided a tighter link between welfare and work), and the increased collaboration with other agencies towards job placement for welfare recipients. However, hurricane recovery efforts have drawn resources and attention away from welfare reform, and social services continues to be a lower priority in the county than she thinks it should be. The DSS Director is also concerned about the long-term effects of sacrificing job training for more immediate job placement.

The County Manager and County Commissioner/Social Services Board Chair are more skeptical of the Work First program. They wonder whether reductions in the welfare rolls are largely due to a robust economy, and if these reductions will disappear when the job market tightens. They are also concerned about the high cost of day care and transportation services to welfare recipients transitioning to work, and how these individuals will fare once these benefits are gone. Finally, they raise interesting questions about the entire administrative structure of the welfare system, and the lack of ownership by the county for a program which is largely state-directed and overseen by an independent board.