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Welfare Caseload Remains Relatively Flat in Second Quarter of 2003

(Washington, DC) — Welfare caseloads remained essentially flat in the United States between March and June 2003, according to new data collected by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). In the second quarter, 22 states reported welfare caseload increases and 28 reported decreases, but the changes in most states were small; for 40 states, the June 2003 caseload was within 3 percent of the March caseload.

CLASP has collected this new data on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseloads through June 2003 from 49 states and the District of Columbia (figures from Maine are not available, due to the state's transition to a new computer system). These are the most current and complete data available.

Without data from Maine, it is not possible to tabulate a figure for the national welfare caseload. However, the caseload total for the other 49 states and the District of Columbia decreased 0.1 percent between March and June. Over the past year (June 2002-June 2003), the overall caseload (excluding Maine) rose by 0.3 percent. The national welfare caseload has declined each year since 1997. However, the rate of decline has steadily slowed, and now the national caseload appears essentially flat.

The new analysis from CLASP notes the sharp contrast between flattening welfare caseloads and rising food stamp caseloads between 2001 and 2003. "Although it might be expected that caseloads for the two programs would move in tandem during an economic downturn, it appears that the Food Stamp Program has been far more responsive to increased economic need than the TANF program," noted Elise Richer, CLASP Senior Policy Analyst and co-author of the caseload analysis.

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To view the new data and CLASP's analysis, visit http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs_New. To set up an interview with Elise Richer or another CLASP expert, contact John Hutchins at (202) 906-8013.

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A national, nonprofit organization founded in 1968, CLASP conducts research, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security of low-income families with children.