

Welfare Recipients: Better Off Without the Government?

Should the many welfare programs in the U.S. (such as food stamps, Medicaid, etc.) be replaced with a lump sum of cash handouts?

In this week's [Washington Post](#), columnist Matt Zwolinski argues that they should. Zwolinski notes that such a scenario would create more efficiency in the welfare system, give recipients more human dignity, and be better able to meet the actual needs of individuals:

“As long as we assume that people know more (and care more) about their own needs than the government does, the case for cash over in-kind benefits is powerful. Cash is flexible. Cash is freedom.”

But at the same time, the solution Zwolinski is offering continues to run welfare money through the hands of an entity far removed from welfare recipients, namely, the government. Because of the distance between the recipient and the government, such a system seems likely to encourage long-term dependence and promote fraud.

But could fraud be diminished and welfare recipients actually be better off if aid and support systems operated outside of the government?

Early 19th century author Alexis de Tocqueville thought so. In his [Memoir on Pauperism](#), Tocqueville declared:

“I am deeply convinced that any permanent, regular, administrative system whose aim will be to provide for the needs of the poor, will breed more miseries than it can cure, will deprave the population that it wants to help and

comfort, will in time reduce the rich to being no more than the tenant-farmers of the poor, will dry up the sources of savings, will stop the accumulation of capital, will retard the development of trade, will benumb human industry and activity, and will culminate by bringing about a violent revolution in the State, when the number of those who receive alms will have become as large as those who give it, and the indigent, no longer being able to take from the impoverished rich the means of providing for his needs, will find it easier to plunder them of all their property at one stroke than to ask for their help."

America's system of welfare was once run through "mutual aid societies," which brought small, local groups of individuals together to help their neighbors with money and other support in times of need. Do you think our nation would see a decline in the need for various welfare programs if such a system of local, personal aid was still in place?

Image Credit: Clementine Gallot