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Unsilencing the casualties of welfare reform: The untold story of welfare fraud

Abstract

The experiences of women who have been charged with welfare fraud in the years following the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act cast a shadow over the claim that welfare reform has been an unequivocal success. This article addresses this under-explored issue by considering the face of welfare fraud in San Diego, California after the change to federal welfare law. After a brief discussion of the socio-historical context of welfare fraud prosecution and a summary of the scholarly findings related to welfare fraud post-PRWORA, the article details a new “poverty knowledge” about welfare fraud drawn from the experiences of women. This is followed by a discussion of how this knowledge has been used to help inspire the creation of a welfare fraud diversion program that serves as an alternative to felony prosecution for first-time, low-level welfare fraud defendants in San Diego County.

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