

# Welfare mothers get push toward college

By Mary Tessier  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Heidi Hart was 15 and scared when she found out she was pregnant. The high school sophomore in Westbrook, Maine, had grown up with an abusive father, and her mother was struggling to raise five children with the help of federal and state assistance. The teen-ager was afraid of becoming an example of a failed teen mother.

"I was a kid dealing with a lot of crap," says Hart, now 26. "I felt terrified that I was sentencing my daughter to a life like mine."

With the help of at-school child care and a supportive family, Hart was able to finish high school.

Then Hart took a step for a teen-aged welfare mother that would be impossible in most of the nation. She enrolled at the University of Southern Maine as part of the state's Parents as Scholars program and still received federal and state benefits, without time limits. She graduated in 2001 with a bachelor's degree, and now holds a job working with young parents at a social service agency. Her salary of about \$30,000 carries full medical and dental benefits. Hart has also just received a grant from the Maine Women's Fund to build a mentor network for welfare recipients who want to attend college.

## Only Maine 'Stops the Clock'

Many states and cities have also seen the benefit of permitting single parents receiving welfare to pursue higher education. Many allow education and federal welfare to commingle to a degree, but they impose time limits and work requirements that limit the extent to which recipients, in reality, can pursue higher education. In New York City, for example, it took a lawsuit for education to count as "work." Advocates in California have won a similar battle over how to value the time spent doing homework. Only Wyoming and Maine "stop the clock" on the federal welfare time limits for recipients in college.

Maine's program is small, with about 800 people enrolled each year in a state with just 1.3 million people. The program is technically capped at 2,000 participants. It has been possible through flexible federal rules that now apply to the money that states spend to match federal contributions.

Strong bipartisan support in the Maine legislature for the Parents as Scholars program has helped propel it to the federal level. Now, the effort in Washington is spearheaded by Republican Senator Olympia Snowe in the form of a provision in a Republican welfare bill in the Senate.

As if to demonstrate the power of a single senator in a pivotal position, Snowe used her seat on the Senate Finance Committee to block welfare legislation until the committee bill included a provision that allows all states to offer the Parents as Scholars program without a special waiver.

The bill, waiting to go into Senate debate, allows other states to adopt the program. It still faces many legislative steps in Washington and will still only be available in states that approve the program. The House has already approved its own, more conservative bill, with no similar allowance for higher education.

The House bill also has tougher work requirements and less assistance with health care and child care. Assuming the Senate approves the bill, a House-Senate conference committee will have the task of putting a reconciled version in front of both chambers for passage. From there, it will go to the White House, for the president to sign into law or veto.

Advocates for low-income women, such as lobbyist Christ Hastedt of the Maine Equal Justice Project, predict that a huge political effort will be required to keep the college provision in any federal welfare bill.

"It's going to take public support and Senator Snowe being persuasive with the conference committee and then with the White House," Hastedt says.

Snowe had blocked passage of any welfare reauthorization bill that did not include a provision for post-secondary education, Republican and Democratic Senate staffers say. Her proposal for the Senate was based on the Maine program for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, as federal welfare benefits to single parents have been known since the passage of the 1996 welfare law.

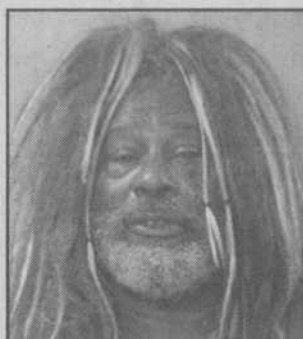
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# Funk pioneer George Clinton arrested

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - Funk music pioneer George Clinton was arrested and charged with drug possession after allegedly telling an officer he had cocaine in his pocket.

Clinton, of Tallahassee, was arrested Saturday and bonded out of jail over the weekend, according to jail officials, who wouldn't release any other information. Clinton's lawyer, Shoshana Zisk of San Francisco, didn't immediately return a call seeking comment.

Clinton, 63, who headed the funk bands Parliament and Funkadelic — and the



Funk music pioneer George Clinton, shown in an undated booking mug.

collaboration later known as P-Funk — in the 1970s and 1980s is considered a father of the genre. In 1983, Clinton's solo record "Atomic Dog," hit number

one on the R&B charts.

Tallahassee Police said an officer noticed a man sitting by himself in the passenger seat of a car in a gas station parking lot about 2 a.m. Saturday and approached to talk to him.

When the officer got to the car, the man, later determined to be Clinton, tried to hide an item he was holding, dropping it between the seats, said Tallahassee Police spokesman Stewart Clendinen.

Clinton started to reach into his pocket and the officer asked him if he had anything in his pocket that might

be dangerous, Clendinen said. Clinton allegedly responded "I've got a little cocaine."

The item he is accused of dropping between the seats turned out to be a crack pipe, police said.

Clinton was charged with one felony count of cocaine possession and a misdemeanor count of possession of the pipe, the Tallahassee Democrat first reported for Tuesday papers.

A call to George Clinton Enterprises for comment Monday went unanswered and Clinton's home number is unlisted.

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Columbus National Life  
Commercial Life  
Commercial State Life  
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Dixie Life  
Druid Life  
Durham Life  
Empire Life & Accident  
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Guaranty Life  
Home Security Life  
Immediate Benefit Life  
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Lincoln Life  
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National Standard Life  
Newbery Life & Health  
Orange State Life  
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