The Victims of "Welfare Reform"

The following letter from me was published in the *Boston Globe* on June 26, 2013.

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To the Editor:

Senator Theresa Murray is pleased that the welfare bill she sponsored in 1995 has cut the number of recipients by half ("Senate drafts welfare overhaul," *Boston Globe* 6/18/13). However, if she really cared about what happened to those recipients who were kicked off welfare, she might not be so pleased.

According to a recent study by the National Poverty Center, the prevalence of extreme poverty has risen sharply since 1996, particularly among those most impacted by the 1996 federal welfare reform. Between 1996 and 2011 there was an increase in extreme poverty among U.S. households with children. ("Extreme poverty" is defined as having $2 or less, per person, per day.)

In the midst of the slow recovery following the Great Recession, millions of parents are experiencing long spells of unemployment, but they have little immediate access to means-tested cash income support.

Nearly 16 million children in the United States—22% of all children—live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level—$23,021 a year for a family of four. Research shows that, on average, families need an income of about twice that level to cover basic expenses. Using this standard, 45%

of children live in low-income families.

According to a 2010 study by the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of married couple families living in poverty was 6.2%. For single-parent households in that same year, the poverty rate was 27.3%; for single mother households, the poverty rate was 29.9%.

Is this what Senator Murray considers a success?