Fourth Congressional District—the late Commissioner Diane Ahrens.

Commissioner Ahrens served 20 years on the Ramsey County Board. Elected in 1974, she was the third woman ever to serve as a Ramsey County Commissioner. Ahrens was known as the conscience of the County Board for her commitment to assisting those in need. She worked to deliver services to the mentally ill, victims of abuse or neglect, the disabled, the influx of Hmong immigrants in Ramsey County, those with HIV/AIDS, and many others in need. She was a passionate advocate for human services.

As Marilyn Krueger, a former St. Louis County Commissioner said, ''She was always concerned with the welfare of others, a social worker at heart, she was fierce, unafraid and compassionate.''

In addition, Ahrens was an advocate of reform; she was not afraid to change a county employment system that allowed board members to award contracts and employment to their unqualified personal friends. She helped initiate a study that brought about the hiring of a professional staff to manage Ramsey County administration.

Former Ramsey County Manager Terry Schutten said this about Ahrens in a letter to the St. Paul Pioneer Press, ''. . . I have worked with myriad State and local elected officials. Diane stands out as one of those elected representatives who exemplifies what democracy is all about, as well as the principles we fight for in our country's war on terrorism.''

Mr. Speaker, having personally worked with Commissioner Ahrens, I can attest to the legacy of honest and passionate work she left for the young women and men who will follow in her footsteps of public service. I know she will be remembered for her generosity of spirit and her trail-blazing initiative. The residents of Ramsey County and the Fourth Congressional District owe her a debt of gratitude for her service on our behalf.

WELFARE TO WORK MEANS DIGNITY OF PAYCHECK AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

HON. RODNEY P. FRELINGHUYSEN

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 10, 2002

Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN. Mr. Speaker, this year Congress will reauthorize the landmark welfare reform law that we first passed in 1996. I am pleased to announce that President Bush's proposed welfare reforms build on our successes in that historic 1996 welfare reform law by encouraging personal responsibility, continuing to focus on strengthening families and helping more welfare recipients find work and secure their independence.

Back in 1996, Members of Congress worked together to reach a historic, bipartisan agreement to reform the welfare system. These efforts resulted in one of the greatest public policy successes in decades as millions of Americans went from welfare to work. Since 1996, welfare dependency has decreased dramatically. The number of individuals receiving cash assistance has dropped by 56 percent, more single mothers are employed, and child poverty rates are at the lowest level since 1978. These reforms are more than simply a win for taxpayers who for years and years supported an ineffective system with their hard-earned tax dollars. The new system has provided opportunity for millions of Americans who jumped at the chance to improve the quality of their lives by getting a job and providing for their families, all while achieving the dignity of doing it on their own. Our 'Welfare to Work' reforms helped those less fortunate with a hand up, instead of a handout.

Every state has benefited from these reforms, and in my New Jersey's 11th Congressional District, we have witnessed many success stories. Here are just a few examples:

1. An HIV-positive single mother, with one child and separated from an abusive husband, entered the Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1995. Her case manager arranged transportation and childcare for her, which allowed her to complete sufficient college courses for entry into the Morristown Memorial Hospital School of Cardiovascular Technology. She was one of 12 students accepted into the competitive, demanding program and graduated fourth in her class. While attending school, she gained valuable work experience through the Alternative Work Experience Program. On completing training, she began working in a doctor's office. Post TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families) childcare facilitated her ability to have excellent attendance and, ultimately, a promotion to Cardiovascular Technologist at $40,000 per year.

She has purchased a home and is a foster-parent to several children. After extensive marriage counseling and family therapy, arranged through her case manager, she reunited with her husband in 1999. She credits her case manager with providing counseling, training,a and support services in ''turning my life around in ways I could never imagine before I entered the TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families) program.''

2. A 23 year-old domestic violence victim and single mother of two small children entered the AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children) program in 1995. At her case manager's urging, she enrolled in a GED course. TANF childcare and transportation support enabled her to obtain her high school diploma and gain admission to the County College of Morris. Her case manager arranged a part-time, on-campus job for her. She received childcare and Medicaid that allowed her to complete her Associate's Degree without interruption. She attended William Paterson College as a part-time student while participating in the Alternative Work Experience Program. The Alternative Work Experience Program is a combination of work experience and training activities. In 2000, after extensive counseling with her case manager, she decided that she would work full-time and attend college at night. She had lost her driver's license so her case manager accessed Welfare-to-Work funds to provide transportation to Group Job Search and other support services.

In July 2001, with her case manager's assistance, her driver's license was reinstated and she started working full-time. Her children are receiving post-TANF childcare and Medicaid and she credits these services with allowing her to concentrate on work. She is earning $25,000 per year and is rightfully proud of her many accomplishments.

3. A 21-year-old mother of one had been displaced from her home due to domestic violence and was living with her grandmother. Her TANF case manager accessed Welfare-to-Work funds for her to attend training as a computer programmer at Chubb Institute. TANF childcare and Medicaid allowed her to successfully complete her training. Through the Group Job Search Program, she obtained employment as a Graphics Design Technician at $19,000 per year. She continues to receive post TANF childcare assistance. Now, she is a candidate for promotion to a higher paying position and thanks her case manager and the TANF program for ''getting my life on the right track, in a very short time.''

4. A young mother in 2001 could not work because of childcare problems and expenses. She found employment through the Job Search Program and also attended training to become a home health aid while continuing to work. She was very focused, diligent and worked very hard to upgrade her earning ability and through the Work First Program, her childcare expenses were supplemented and she was helped financially with purchasing an automobile. Today, she is off welfare, working and is doing well.

5. A husband, his wife and two daughters entered this country as political refugees from Vietnam. He was incarcerated during the Vietnam War and as a result was diagnosed with malnutrition. Due to his frail health, he found it difficult to find steady employment. He was placed in a Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) at a local Board of Social Services. He was so successful in that position that the Board hired him for a permanent position and he has remained gainfully employed, providing for his family, for more than a year.

Even with these notable successes, much remains to be done to improve the welfare system for those in need and to help welfare recipients on the path to independence. While more than three million welfare recipients have been removed from a system that promoted an indefinite dependency and have been placed into jobs, there remains two million people who have yet to follow in the footsteps of these success stories and find the personal independence that comes with the dignity of a job.

With the President's leadership and a bipartisan effort in Congress, our next round of reforms will help ensure $22 billion annually is available for welfare programs that prepare recipients for work and help with childcare. We will also continue to ensure that the mission of our ''Welfare to Work'' reforms is to strengthen families. It is vital that Federal policy maintains support for low-income working families by expanding childcare and health insurance for children. Additionally, we will continue to make sure the Earned Income Tax Credit provides income supplements of up to $4,000 per year to single mothers leaving welfare to work.

Finally, much of the success of the reforms passed in 1996 is due to the greater flexibility given to states by the Federal government to implement innovations in welfare programs. Our renewed reforms will strengthen the Federal/state partnership and expand upon measures to provide flexibility to states to improve coordination across programs so that more adults can achieve independence from welfare while gaining greater financial and social security for their families and their future.