



REAUTHORIZE THE TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) BLOCK GRANT

ACTION NEEDED: Urge your members of Congress, particularly those who serve on the House Ways and Means Committee, the House Education and the Workforce Committee, the Senate Finance Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant (TANF). The current authorization, included in the FY 2015 “CRomnibus” spending bill (P.L. 113-235), will expire September 30, 2015.

BACKGROUND: The TANF program was created in 1996 and replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. TANF is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and features four program goals: providing assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes; reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; preventing and reducing unplanned pregnancies among single young adults and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

TANF is an entitlement to the states and is not subject to the annual appropriations process. The program has been funded at \$16.5 billion since its inception. In addition to the federal funding provided under the program, a state must contribute to the program through a maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement that is 80 percent of what the state paid to AFDC in 1994. In 2011, the MOE contribution from states was \$15 billion. TANF is a partnership between the federal government and the states, but some states partner with their counties to operate the program. These states include California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin. Additionally, Montgomery County, Maryland operates TANF.

QUICK FACTS

- **Counties in Calif., Colo., Minn., N.J., N.Y., N.C., N.D., Ohio, Va. and Wisc., as well as, Montgomery County, Md., Operate TANF.**
- **TANF has not received a long-term reauthorization since 2005 and is scheduled to expire September 30, 2015 as part of the FY 2015 “CRomnibus” spending bill (P.L. 113-235)**
- **The original intent of TANF was to allow states to design the program according to their needs, but that flexibility has since been reduced and should be restored**

TANF was designed to give states great flexibility in designing programs and determining eligibility, benefits and services. TANF funds are used for cash assistance, as well as non-cash assistance such as child care, education, job training and work support programs. While states have more flexibility under TANF than they did under AFDC, the program has some requirements: for families to qualify for TANF, states must require participation in work activities, and a percentage of those required to participate in such activities must do so for at least 30 hours a week, or 20 hours for single parents with small children. There is a five-year limit for cash assistance to families that include an adult recipient, although states can exceed the time limit by up to 20 percent of the caseload, based on hardship.

TANF originally counted 12 activities toward work participation, but the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA, P.L. 109-171) reduced them to nine core activities and three non-core activities. Non-core activities can only count if the individual participates in core activities for at least 20 hours a week. The nine core activities are unsubsidized employment, subsidized private-sector employment, work experience, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness, community service, vocational education and providing child care to an individual participating in community service. The non-core activities are job skills training directly related to employment, education directly related to employment and satisfactory attendance at a secondary school or high school equivalency (GED) program. High school or participation in a GED program counts as a core activity for parents under the age of 20. Some of these activities have further restrictions; job search and job readiness can only be undertaken for six weeks a year or four consecutive weeks; vocational education is limited to 12 months and for no more than 30 percent of the families.

TANF was reauthorized as part of the 2005 DRA, but expired in 2010 and has since been reauthorized through a series of short-term extensions. Most recently, TANF was extended through September 30, 2015 as part of the FY 2015 “CRomnibus” spending bill (P.L. 113-235).

KEY ISSUES:

- The TANF block grant provides funding to states to help families reduce welfare dependency and allows states to design and implement the program according to their needs. Counties that operate TANF have a direct stake in the program in that they share administrative costs and may also fund part of the state MOE requirements. Additionally, sanctions that are imposed on the state for failure to meet program requirements are often passed down to the counties. Counties in all states benefit if TANF participants are able to find employment and attain self-sufficiency.
- Long-term reauthorization of TANF will provide program continuity. Short-term extensions create uncertainty and make it difficult to plan and implement long-term program changes.
- TANF reauthorization should provide greater state and county flexibility to deliver services that support families and help move them off welfare, including allowing higher education to count as work and realistic time limits on education.
- Many TANF families struggle with multiple barriers to self-sufficiency, such as disabilities, mental health issues, domestic violence and substance use disorder. As a result, they may not always be able to meet the full participation requirements. States and counties should be given the flexibility to provide partial credit to these families with special needs.

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