

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provides assistance and work opportunities to needy families. It replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC) as soon as the State submitted a complete plan implementing TANF, but no later than July 1, 1997. AFDC provided cash assistance based on need, income, resources, and family size.

TANF was created by The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193). The law contains strong work requirements, a performance bonus to reward States for moving welfare recipients into jobs, State maintenance of effort requirements, comprehensive child support enforcement, and supports for families moving from welfare to work, including increased funding for child care and guaranteed medical coverage.

Nearly all recipients must work after 2 years of assistance. Each State is required to have a fourth of families working or off the rolls by September 30, 1997, and half by 2002. Parents must work a prescribed number of hours per week: single parents, 20 hours the first year and 30 by 2000; couples, 35 hours. Work can be unsubsidized or subsidized employment, on-the-job training, work experience, community service, 12 months of vocational training, or child care provided to individuals participating in community service. Exceptions are allowed for 6 weeks of job search time, parents with a child under age 6 who cannot find child care, and single parents with children under age one.

States must make an initial assessment of recipients' skills, and can develop personal responsibility plans that identify needed education, training, and job placement services. Various incentives

are provided to States to encourage maintaining program spending levels.

Families cannot spend more than five cumulative years on TANF. States can specify fewer years, and exempt up to 20% of the caseload from the time limit. After the time limit is exceeded, they can elect to provide noncash assistance and vouchers to families using Social Services Block Grant or State funds.

Child care funding is provided to help more mothers move into jobs. Women on welfare continue to receive health coverage for their families, including a year or more of transitional Medicaid when they leave welfare for work.

To be eligible for TANF block grants, States must operate a child support enforcement program meeting Federal requirements. The Federal Case Registry and National Directory of New Hires will be used to track delinquent parents across State lines. Child support can be withheld directly from wages, and paternity establishment is streamlined; cash assistance will be reduced by at least 25% in cases of failure to cooperate with paternity establishment. The law establishes uniform interstate child support laws, central registries of child support orders and collections, and toughened enforcement of child support.

Unmarried minor parents are required to live with a responsible adult or in an adult-supervised setting and participate in educational and training activities in order to receive assistance. Efforts are to be undertaken to prevent nonmarital teen pregnancy.