



## DRAFT FOR COMMENTS

### TANF State Plan

*Effective October 1, 2020*

January 7, 2021

#### **Public Posting Announcement: Draft TANF State Plan**

The District of Columbia (“District” or “D.C.”) prepared the draft Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) State plan renewal effective October 1, 2020, in accordance with the requirements of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, and in accordance with Title IV-A, Section 402 of the Social Security Act (SSA), as amended.

The District’s new State Plan has been updated to reflect new policies that went into effect on April 1, 2018, along with additional changes that went into effect as a result of the current COVID -19 public health emergency.

#### **Brief Overview of Changes**

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, at the direction of Mayor Muriel E. Bowser, DHS convened a TANF Hardship Working Group to recommend a Hardship Extension Policy for customers who received TANF in D.C. for 60-months or longer. The TANF Hardship Working Group included D.C. Department of Human Services (DHS) staff, local advocate organizations, members and staff of the D.C. Council, TANF Education and Employment Program (TEP) providers, and most importantly, TANF customers. When the working group was convened, the TANF policy at the time called for a termination of TANF cash assistance benefits in October 2017 for customers who had reached the Federal 60-month TANF cash assistance benefit time limit.

The culmination of both activities led to the development of the current TANF Policy that took effect April 1, 2018 along with revisions to the TEP service delivery model that took effect on October 1, 2018. The new TANF Policy in D.C. accomplished three critical goals:

- **No Time Limit:** Time limit for families who receive TANF was eliminated;
- **Increased Benefits:** DHS restored the reduced benefits to the appropriate levels for families who had received TANF for longer than 60 months; and
- **Reduced Sanction:** The maximum sanction level for non-participation in work activities is 6% of the total TANF grant.
  - 80% is the child protection grant
  - 20% is the parental portion of the grant which is subject to sanction



### **Program Values:**

The Budget Support Act for FY 2018 allocated funding for the new 2Gen TANF Policy. The new policy centers on two major program values:

- That the enrichment, security and well-being of children is paramount and cash income to a household is a protective factor for children; and
- That supporting parents to replace income from TANF with income from work through meaningful engagement in education and employment activities that increase their economic security is a program requirement.

### **2 Generational (multi-generational) Approach:**

Enhancements were made to the TEP Contract Model:

DHS refined its TEP model by adjusting the current performance-based contracting model, to incentivize career ladder job placement through an increased focus on education. Decreased case load sizes allow for more one-on-one case coaching and family stabilization support through a focus on 2 Gen activities.

The new performance-based contracts increase incentives for:

- Education and training;
- Employment retention;
- Employment Promotion; and
- Exiting from TANF due to earnings.

2 Gen Approach:

- Supportive services focus on the whole family – recognizing the interconnectedness of well-being and workforce outcomes
- The 2Gen approach can be applied to programs, policies, systems and research

The draft TANF State Plan has a 45-day review period. During the 45-day public review period, DHS will accept comments on the draft TANF State Plan from the general public, including local organizations and local advocate organizations. Comments should be directed to Brian Campbell, Chief of Staff, Economic Security Administration, 64 New York Ave., NE, 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Washington DC 20002, email [Brian.Campbell@dc.gov](mailto:Brian.Campbell@dc.gov).



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STATE PLAN  
FOR ADMINISTRATION OF THE BLOCK  
GRANT FOR TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE  
FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)

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*Effective October 1, 2020*

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The purpose of this document is to outline the District of Columbia’s plan for providing assistance to families with children using funds provided under Title I of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (Pub. L. No. 104-193), and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Final Rules published in the Federal Register on April 12, 1999. The Act amends Section 402 of the Social Security Act to require that states submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) that outlines how the state will provide TANF benefits.

The District of Columbia uses federal and local TANF funds to operate a cash assistance program and provide supportive services for families with children through the District’s TANF program. The local legal authority for this program is the District of Columbia Public Assistance Act of 1982 (D.C. Law § 4-101; D.C. Official Code § 4-201.01, *et seq.*), as amended. The provisions of this Plan are effective October 1, 2020. TANF provides public assistance to low income families with children and connects non-exempt adult recipients not already employed in unsubsidized employment to a robust array of personalized services to enable them to increase their economic security.

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the District of Columbia (D.C.) Department of Human Services (DHS) embarked on a journey to enhance and revise its TANF Employment & Education Program (TEP) to better align with the growing national trend of incorporating a multi-generational (2 Gen) approach to serving TANF customers and their families. DHS sought to integrate the five (5) nationally recognized pillars of this 2 Gen approach (Economic Assets, Social Capital, Health & Well-Being, Post-Secondary/Workforce, and Early Childhood Education) into its service-delivery model. Subsequently, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, at the direction of Mayor Muriel E. Bowser, DHS convened a TANF Hardship Working Group to recommend a Hardship Extension Policy for customers who received TANF in D.C. for 60-months or longer. The TANF Hardship Working Group included DHS staff, local advocate

organizations, members and staff of the D.C. Council, TEP providers, and most importantly, TANF customers. When the working group was convened, the TANF policy at the time called for a termination of TANF cash assistance benefits in October 2017 for customers who had reached the Federal 60-month TANF cash assistance benefit time limit.

The culmination of both activities led to the development of the current TANF Policy that took effect April 1, 2018 along with revisions to the TEP service delivery model that took effect on October 1, 2018. The new TANF Policy in D.C. accomplished three critical goals:

1. Rescinded the plan to terminate benefits at 60+ months, allowing D.C. residents access to cash assistance and employment, education, and barrier remediation services as long as they continue to meet TANF eligibility requirements;
2. Elevated the TANF benefit amount for 60+ month customers who had experienced cash reductions in benefits since 2011 via the previous TANF policy; and
3. Embraced the value that puts families, and most importantly children, first enacting a two-part TANF work sanction policy:
  - a. Bifurcating the monthly TANF benefit, allocating 80% of the benefit for child protection and enrichment, and 20% for parental engagement in employment, education, and barrier remediation services; and
  - b. Eliminating the former, three-level sanction policy that included a full-family sanction, and replacing it with a less punitive, single-level sanction of six (6) percent of the entire TANF grant.

The TANF program also provides an opportunity for families to engage in services that support their capacity to earn a living wage. All the provisions of the D.C. TANF programs are intended to meet one or more of the following basic purposes of TANF as articulated in the Federal statute and regulation:

- 1) Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- 2) End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- 3) Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- 4) Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

## **SECTION 2: PLAN OVERVIEW**

### **Program Goals**

D.C.'s TANF plan fits within the broader key priorities for its residents, which include:

- 1) Create pathways to the middle class for residents;
- 2) Strengthen job training programs that support career-ladder promotion in local high-growth industries and promote generational wealth;
- 3) Ensure customers have access to equitable employment and affordable housing opportunities by leveraging DHS and District-wide resources; and
- 4) Create a more transparent, responsive, innovative, and open government.

In support of the key priorities, DHS has established the following goals that impact D.C. residents who receive TANF:

- a) Support TANF participants to improve their economic stability and well-being by: 1) identifying training programs aligned to career pathways within identified high growth industries that lead to increased employment; 2) creating synergies between the training and employment partners that make-up the D.C. workforce system; 3) implementing creative, data and participant driven service interventions; and, 4) ensuring systems are in place to address customers' specific needs.
- b) Through an integrated economic security and housing stability model, develop an effective system of care for families who experience homelessness to more frequently prevent homelessness, provide shelter to those who need it, and support families on a faster and more stable path out of homelessness.
- c) Improve the customer experience at DHS by streamlining operations and the eligibility determinations process, providing customers with access to self-service and online/mobile applications, and improving customer outreach and engagement efforts.
- d) Through an integrated service delivery model, implement a system of services and supports for youth that strengthens families, mitigates risks related to housing instability, improves school attendance, and decreases court involvement and the likelihood of repeat criminal conduct. Develop multi-generational service interventions that meet the specific needs of parenting youth.

Fundamentally, D.C. has designed a TANF program which recognizes that each individual and each family are unique and that services should be adapted to their specific circumstances, conditions, and needs in order for them to achieve their personal goals. As



such, D.C. has created a TANF program which is tailored to the individual needs of each family. The goal of the program is to help families achieve a pathway to the middle class by realizing their own aspirations.

## **Work Activities**

DHS has designed its TEP service delivery model to include the following enhancements:

1. Rebranded the former Work Readiness (WR) Service Provider type, that focused on education and employment, to Education and Occupational Training (EOT), allowing for enhanced customer incentives and Service Provider bonuses solely focused on increasing customer attainment of credentials that support career-ladder promotion in local high-growth industries;
2. Better incentivized Job Placement (JP) Service Provider contracts to align employment partnerships with at least two (2) of the six (6) high growth industries identified for D.C. (Business Administration and IT, Healthcare, Construction, Hospitality, Security & Law, and Infrastructure);
3. Introduced customer incentives and Service Provider bonuses for promotion and exit from TANF due to earnings;
4. Decreased Case Manager-to-Customer caseload sizes to allow for more in-depth case coaching opportunities; and
5. The inclusion of five (5) nationally recognized 2 Gen activities programmed into DHS's case management and invoicing system to allow for tracking of customer participation in each activity.

D.C. seeks to continuously improve and increase the types of service-delivery options available to customers, and is exploring the following programmatic modifications over the course of the next three (3) years:

1. Modify the timing of the referral process to providers, based on the presenting needs, as defined by each individual customer.

2. D.C. is revising its Work Verification Plan based on ongoing program and policy changes made over the last several years as well as to document operational changes made in response to the current national pandemic.
3. Redesigning TANF Assessment – DHS will make several changes to the TANF assessment including applying a person-centered, full frame lens, along with a strengths based approach that more accurately identify how DHS can best serve the whole family, both parent and child(ren), in the most respectful and productive way.

DHS is also pursuing technological enhancements to its TANF Assessment that would allow customers the option to complete a web-based self-assessment.

### **TANF Program Service Delivery Options**

In addition to funding basic cash assistance and employment and training programs for TANF recipients, D.C. uses or intends to use federal TANF funds for the following activities for TANF-eligible families (for programs and services other than cash assistance, D.C. has eligibility criteria of under 300% of the Federal Poverty Level):

1. *Employment, educational, and support service offerings developed through a multigenerational framework:*
  - a. *Job Placement (JP) Service Providers* assist customers navigate and engage career exploration activities to identify the customer’s preferred work industry and career pathway. Together, the customer and Case Manger create a series of detailed Individual Responsibility Plans (dIRPs) that document the iterative steps and activities the customer will pursue to meet their educational or employment goals. This falls under TANF purpose #3 and is not considered assistance.

- b. *Education & Occupational Training (EOT) Service Providers* assist customers navigate and enroll in education programs that lead to nationally recognized certifications and credentials. The EOT incentive structure recognizes education and occupational training enrollment, maintenance, and completion. Programs may include, but are not limited to, linkage to adult education and vocational educational training, programs that provide fast-track GED exam in 10 weeks or less, English as a Second Language programs, and family literacy programs. For example, DHS worked with its education partner, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), to develop a Community Health Worker (CHW) training for TANF customers in response to the city's efforts to hire 900 Contact Tracers to address the spread of the COVID-19 national pandemic. This falls under TANF purposes #1 & #2 and is not considered assistance.
- c. *Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Assessment and Services* - to assess families for behavioral health and substance abuse disorders. The results of the assessments help case managers identify the appropriate resources and supports to assist families with treatment (these are for services which are not covered by Medicaid). This falls under TANF purpose #2 and is not considered assistance.

In recognition of the importance of a strong mind, body and soul to the development and empowerment of parents and children, DHS is expanding a suite of services under a Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) and is investing time and resources into cultivating relationships with professional groups that support behavioral health programming for parents and their children. DHS is exploring programming that addresses and promotes maternal mental health, peer-led mental health talk therapy groups, and health, wellness, and mindfulness strategies.

- d. *Wraparound Family Services* - to pay for an intensive intervention program for low-income minor parents including both TANF family cash assistance and non-TANF family cash assistance recipients to reduce the incidence of second births to low-income teens. This falls under TANF purposes #1, #2, and #3, and is not considered assistance.
  
- e. *Domestic Violence Services* - to provide counseling and other service to TANF applicants and recipients who indicated a history of domestic violence. These service providers assess the TANF applicants or recipients who indicate a history of domestic violence and develop a plan of service with individuals. The services also include aid to families who are the victims of domestic violence. This falls under TANF purpose #1 and is not considered assistance.
  
- f. *Family Emergency Services* - to provide services to families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Funds may be used for program enhancements, including the provision of shelter and case management services for families in District shelters and/or in support of energy assistance to families to help avoid homelessness. This falls under TANF purpose #1 and may be considered assistance.
  
- g. *Fatherhood Initiative* - to provide a continuum of supportive services to fathers of children in low-income families. Specifically, TANF funds support life skills education, group peer instruction, mediation services, counseling, and instruction on effective parenting. Services may include those to assist ex-offenders with their re-entry transition. The services and supports are geared to assist with increasing child support payments by non-custodial fathers. This falls under TANF purposes #1 and #4 and is not considered assistance.

- h. DHS recognizes that the *Digital Divide* created challenges in customers engaging in activities. As DHS pivots to offering more virtual services, DHS will continue to explore opportunities to partner with community leaders and organizations to provide connections to internet access and equipment.
- i. *Tuition Assistance Program Initiative for TANF (TAPIT)* - to provide tuition assistance for TANF recipients pursuing post-secondary education. TAPIT participants generally combine school attendance with employment-related activities such as a work-study program. TAPIT is the funding source of last resort, and recipients receive assistance pursuing alternative funding sources including Pell grants and District-supported tuition assistance. This falls under TANF purpose #2 and is not considered assistance.
- j. *Transfers to Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)* - to transfer Funds to the SSBG to support housing stability for families with children (SSBG only serves families who fall within 200% of FPL). Stable housing supports parents in finding sustainable employment and earning off of TANF.
- k. *Child Care* - to fund child care subsidy payments for low income families in order for them to participate in occupational training and education, obtain or maintain employment, strengthen the family and end dependency on public assistance. This supports the 2 Gen approach and is offered through the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). This falls under TANF purpose #2 and may be considered assistance.
- l. *Family Preservation Services* - to provide family preservation-related services to low-income families with children. These services may include short-term out-of-home placements when a child is removed due to a family crisis. Such services may not be supported for more than 180 days and must be provided in conjunction with an assessment or services geared toward

family reunification. This falls under TANF purpose #1 and may be considered assistance.

- m. *Services to Teen Parents in Foster Care* - to provide an array of services to teen parents transitioning from foster care to independence, by assisting the teen parent to make successful transitions and prepare for employment or complete their educational/occupational training goals. These services will support the goal of reducing out-of-wedlock childbearing, good parenting skills and pathway to the middle class among this group. This falls under TANF purposes #1 and #3 and is not considered assistance.
- n. *Community Mini-Grants* - to provide small grants (typically less than \$40,000) to community-based organizations that provide services to needy families with children. The grantees may be organizations with overall budgets of less than \$150,000. These grants are largely to meet TANF purposes #3 and #4 and are not considered assistance.
- o. *Children's Services* - to support unmet needs among D.C.'s children and youth and to provide grants to community entities to meet those needs. Grants utilize a variety of populations-and neighborhood-specific approaches designed to strengthen families and prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock births. This falls under TANF purposes #1, #3 and #4, and is not considered assistance.
- p. *Home Visiting Services* - to conduct home visits with customers to encourage engagement for those who may be at risk of sanction, customers who have been sanctioned and long-term TANF recipients who are not engaged. Home visitors conduct an in-depth assessment of the needs and barriers of customers and assist the customers in reconnecting with or fully engaging in work-related activities. Home visitors also make referrals to a

wide array of supportive services to address identified barriers. This falls under TANF purposes #1 and #2 and is not considered assistance.

- q. *Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)* - to help customers build assets which may be used by families consistent with guidelines for such a program outlined in the Social Security Act and policy guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This falls under TANF purpose #2 and may be considered non assistance.
- r. *Services to Families with Youth involved with Juvenile Court* - to provide an array of services to youth involved with the juvenile court and their families. This will help children to become productive and competent members of society and families. This falls under TANF purpose #1 and is not considered assistance.
- s. *Subsidized Employment and Supported Employment* - to fund subsidized and/or supported employment for both custodial and non-custodial parents, as well as youth. This falls under TANF purposes #1 and #2 and is considered non assistance.
- t. *Housing* - to help families secure or maintain permanent housing. This falls under TANF purpose #1 and may be considered assistance.
- u. *Earned Income Tax Credits* - to inform families about the availability of earned income tax credits for families. This falls under TANF purpose #1 and is not considered assistance.
- v. *Financial Management and Budgeting* – to provide training and support to families to manage a budget; save to increase economic stability and family

well-being; and, utilize banking opportunities to increase credit rating. This falls under TANF purpose #2 and is not considered assistance.

- w. *Workplace Communication and Professional Development Training* - to assist TANF participants with fostering quality communication with employers and peers to improve job placement and retention. This falls under TANF purpose #2 and is not considered assistance.
- x. *Grandparent Subsidy Program* – to support grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren in their homes. This falls under TANF purposes #1 and #2 and may be considered assistance.

### **Exemptions from Work Requirements**

Effective October 2013, DHS began conducting comprehensive assessments of TANF applicants, as a condition of eligibility, to determine their work readiness or exemptions as well as to identify barriers to employment. These strength-based assessments are the basis for the formulation of the initial Individual Responsibility Plan (iIRP); detailed Individual Responsibility Plan (dIRP); and customized referrals. The assessment allows the applicant and the Agency, in partnership, to identify the individual's strengths, employment history, education history, and barriers to employment. In addition, the assessments enable the Agency to identify barriers that may be possible exemptions to the work requirements.

The following applicants and recipients are exempt under District law from requirements to participate in work-related activities:

- a) A minor who is not the head of an assistance unit;



- b) A single custodial parent or caretaker<sup>1</sup> who personally provides care for a child under six years of age, who cannot obtain needed appropriate childcare because it is unaffordable or not within a reasonable distance of parent or caretaker's home or work activity;
- c) A single custodial parent with a child under 12 months of age for up to 12 months total;
- d) A recipient over the age of 59;
- e) Both parents or caretakers in a two-parent or two-caretaker assistance unit (if assistance unit is eligible for TANF because of one parent or caretaker's incapacity), if the non-incapacitated parent or caretaker is personally providing care for a child under six (6) years old and demonstrates an inability, as determined by the Director or his or her designee, to obtain needed child care because:
  - i. Appropriate and affordable formal child care is unavailable;
  - ii. Informal child care (such as by a relative) is unavailable or unsuitable; or
  - iii. Appropriate child care, formal or informal, within a reasonable distance from the parent or caretaker's home or job search/job readiness site is unavailable;
- f) A person who is ill, injured or incapacitated as determined by competent medical evidence;
- g) A person who is needed at home because another household member requires the individual's presence due to illness or incapacity;

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<sup>1</sup> Although exempt from DC work requirements-those who do not qualify for a federal exemption will be included in the universe of reported cases.

- h) A person who is pregnant and presents medical verification that she is in the second or third trimester;
- i) Individuals in a two-parent assistance unit who are already working in volunteer employment, work experience, or participating in another activity that has been approved as work participation, and the total number of hours in which the individual and the other parent in the assistance unit are participating is at least 35 hours per week (or 55 hours per week, if the family receives federally-funded child care and no adult in the family has a disability or is caring for a child with a disability);
- j) A full-time AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) volunteer do not have to participate in activities with a job vendor;
- k) A person in a one (1) parent assistance unit who is working in paid or approved volunteer employment, approved work experience, or participating in another activity countable as work under District law for the minimum number of hours required to meet the work participation rate as set forth by subsection 5804.2; and,
- l) With respect to the District-funded portion of TANF, individuals who are enrolled in local, accredited post-secondary educational institutions.
- m) A teen parent who can provide proof of school attendance or who can demonstrate that there is either a lack of needed child care for a child under six that prevents the teen parent's school attendance or that a child's verified special health needs prevent the child's regular attendance at school.

When administering the Block Grant for TANF, D.C. will defer to any existing TANF provisions or subsequent changes in federal law that may conflict with D.C. law and regulations. It is not the intent of D.C. that any provision of its TANF Plan be construed as an entitlement. This plan will be amended, as necessary, to reflect future program changes required after the opportunity for further consideration by the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia.

### **SECTION 3: GENERAL PROVISIONS**

- 1) *Provide Assistance to Needy Families:* D.C. will use TANF funds to administer a cash assistance program for needy families with children. A family is a group that includes at least one child age, not yet 18, or not yet 19 if a full-time student, and with at least one parent or related caretaker. The child may be an unborn child or a child receiving Supplemental Security Income, in which case the needs of the child are not included in the TANF payment. The parent or caretaker may or may not be factored into the TANF payment, but all TANF households must include at least one person. The eligibility rules and work participation requirements and exemptions will be the same throughout D.C. In D.C., a TANF household may receive cash assistance for longer than the federal 60-month time limit, in accordance with D.C. statute and regulation; however, these additional months are funded with local appropriations. In addition to providing cash assistance to needy families, the D.C. TANF program will also provide job placement, education and occupational training, and support services through TEP. The District's TANF program will seek to enable families to achieve greater economic mobility and family stability through a 2 Gen approach.
  
- 2) *Work Requirement:* Non-exempt parents or caretakers receiving assistance are required to engage and participate in work activities. The activities are designed to address the unique presenting needs of each respective individual. The

assessment, and consultation with the customer, will determine the appropriate activities and service connections to outline in the Detailed Individual Responsibility Plan (DIRP). Customers are strongly encouraged to participate in TEP, and other support services offered by DHS. Each customer will be referred to a primary service provider in TEP. The providers may be contracted vendors, sister agencies, community providers, or DHS administered programs. DHS is a primary partner in the implementation of the District of Columbia's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified State Plan, which is managed by the Workforce Investment Council (WIC).

Customers shall have access to all WIOA programming, services and work activities that support their goals outlined in the DIRP beyond those coordinated by DHS. Customers will submit supporting verifiable documentation for purposes of the work verification plan to DHS and receive credit toward compliance with the work participation requirements; provided these activities are addressed and agreed upon in the DIRP.

As a primary partner, DHS will have a staff person co-located at D.C.'s WIOA mandated "One-Stop" site located at one of D.C.'s American Job Centers (AJC). The AJC is where D.C. residents have access to all services that assist residents in evaluating and determining their career plans and service requirements. The "One-Stop" site assures that the training and support provided to job seekers also aligns with the needs of the D.C.'s employers for recruiting, training and retaining talent. In addition, DHS is committed to working with all WIOA partners to focus efforts and resources to ensure the needs of job seekers and workers with barriers to employment are effectively addressed in the AJC system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, DHS remains committed to maintaining the partnership with WIC, the One-Stop operator and other WIOA partners in a virtual environment.

- 3) *Section 407 Work Requirements:* Non-exempt parents and caretakers receiving assistance under the program shall be engaged in work activities as appropriate in accordance with Section 407 of the Social Security Act. This will be achieved by strongly encouraging TANF customers to participate in employment-related programs offered through TEP (Exemptions are based on D.C. law and regulations).
- 4) *Confidentiality:* Reasonable steps will be taken to restrict the use and disclosure of information about individuals and families receiving assistance under the program attributable to funds provided by the federal government. D.C. maintains a strict confidentiality policy under which information about TANF applicants or recipients may not be disclosed to third parties, without the consent of the applicant or recipient, except in specific cases permitted by law, including, but not limited to; information reported to the Child and Family Service Agency or law enforcement related to child abuse or neglect, information provided to law enforcement authorities when DHS has knowledge of the commission of a crime or when law enforcement requests information needed for criminal investigations or proceedings, and information reported to the D.C. Office of Attorney General Child Support Enforcement Division for the purpose of establishing paternity and collecting child support.
- 5) *Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies:* D.C. may use TANF funds to administer teen pregnancy prevention efforts either internally or in partnership with community organizations or sister agencies. The District focuses its efforts on reducing teen pregnancy. Research shows, that teen pregnancy can impair a teen's ability to secure the education and career necessary to financially provide for themselves and their family.

- 6) *Statutory Rape:* Through D.C.'s Teen Parent Assessment Program (TPAP), D.C. will disseminate programming and information about the issue of all forms of sexual violence, including statutory rape, to relevant agencies and programs, including teen pregnancy prevention programs, local law enforcement officials, the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), and counseling services that work with DHS's TANF population.

#### **SECTION 4: SPECIAL PROVISIONS**

- 1) *Treatment of New Entrants to the District of Columbia:* D.C. does not treat new entrants to D.C. differently from other D.C. residents.
- 2) *Treatment of Immigrants:* D.C. provides assistance to all qualified immigrants except for those immigrants who entered on or after August 22, 1996, who have not been in the country for five (5) years, and who are not otherwise exempt from the five-year limitation imposed by Federal law.
- 3) *Fair and Equitable Treatment:* While D.C. law does not provide an entitlement to TANF-funded assistance, the TANF cash assistance program (including TANF-related services) provides equal treatment for all applicants/recipients. That is, families in similar situations are treated similarly.
- 4) *Access to Benefits:* The following are the basic TANF (and MOE-funded Segregated State) cash assistance program parameters:
  - a) *Benefit Calculation:* For applicants, D.C. disregards on a monthly basis, the first \$160 of earnings for work expenses. Out-of-pocket dependent care costs are also deducted monthly up to a maximum

of \$200 per child under two years of age, or \$175 per child two years of age or older. If the applicant's remaining countable income exceeds D.C.'s maximum payment level, the applicant is ineligible for benefits. When determining the eligibility of on-going recipients and the level of benefits to which a family is eligible to receive, a \$160 work expense deduction is applied and then an additional two thirds of remaining earned income is deducted to compute countable earned income. The same dependent care deductions apply to recipients and applicants. A family is eligible for benefits equal to the difference between its countable income (composed of countable earned and unearned income) and the payment level.

D.C. has conformed its asset and resource limit to those utilized under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program (\$2,250 or \$3,250 for households with at least one elderly or disabled member). D.C. will disregard the entire value of all vehicles owned by or registered to the TANF applicant or recipient's household.

Recipients must report all changes in circumstances within 10 days of the change. TANF recipients with earned income are required to report changes in income every six (6) months.

- b) *Orientation and Assessment:* All eligible applicants attend an orientation and complete an assessment. Both are administered by DHS. Failure to complete either without good cause will result in a denial of benefits.
- c) *Work Requirements:* Non-exempt recipients are strongly encouraged to participate in work and education activities through TEP (Exemption criteria are listed above). Failing to participate in

work and education activities without good cause leads to a 6% reduction of the TANF grant. Parents receiving TANF are required and encouraged to develop and sign a Detailed Individual Responsibility Plan (DIRP). Every customer participating in TEP is required and encouraged to complete the DIRP upon referral to their primary service provider. A customer may have a secondary service provider as well (e.g., for behavioral health services or housing services). Those activities count towards the participation requirement, but it is the responsibility of the primary service provider to coordinate and report those activities. The DIRP may establish barrier removal, education, and/or employment goals - including the work/education activities in which the recipient must participate and describe the services D.C. will provide to assist the individual to attain economic mobility.

D.C. does not require an individual who is a single custodial parent caring for a child who has not attained 12 months of age to engage in work activities for up to 12 months. In determining the participation rate for work requirements, D.C. does not count the single custodial parent who has been determined to be exempt from work on the ground that he or she is caring for a child under the age of 12 months. This exclusion applies for a period not to exceed 12 months per incident.

- d) *Child Support Requirement:* Recipients must assign their child support rights to D.C. and must cooperate with child support requirements. Failure to cooperate with child support requirements, without good cause, leads to a 25% reduction in the family's TANF grant. TANF applicants and recipients are informed by both the TANF (DHS Economic Security Administration (ESA)) and child



support (D.C. Office of the Attorney General (OAG) Child Support Services Division (CSSD)) agencies of their right to claim good cause and the circumstances that would constitute good cause for failing to cooperate with child support requirements. The Child Support Agency makes the determination regarding whether good cause exists for failing to cooperate with child support requirements. A TANF customer who fails to cooperate with child support and is also subject to sanction by the TANF program for failure to meet the work requirements may be subject to two (2) sanctions. The sanctions will not be applied simultaneously; the TANF work sanction will be applied once the child support sanction is lifted.

- e) *Time Limit:* Effective April 1, 2018, D.C. no longer has a time limit on receiving TANF benefits. D.C. does not use federal funds for this, unless the exceptions provided at 45 CFR §264.1(c) are met.
- f) *Minor Child Absent from the Home:* D.C. will continue cash assistance for a child absent from the home, while residing in D.C., for no more than 90 consecutive days, unless good cause is established.
- g) *Application Timeframes:* TANF applications must be approved or denied within 45 days of the date of application or within 15 days of the date of sending a 30-day notice that informs the applicant of the need to provide additional information to verify eligibility factors. TANF recipients are also required to recertify every 12 months to continue eligibility, except during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

- h) *Notice of Adverse Action:* Prior to the imposition of any adverse action, including a sanction, case closure, or benefit reduction, a notice of adverse action must be sent to the recipient. The notice must meet the adequate and timely standards. To be adequate, the notice must describe the action to be taken, the reason for the action, and the right to appeal the action. The notice must also include a statement of the legal authority for the action. To be timely, the notice must be sent at least 15 days prior to the effective date of the adverse action.
- i) *Administrative Review and Fair Hearing Rights:* TANF applicants or recipients who disagree with a proposed action, or an action that has been taken, may request an administrative review and/or a fair hearing. Administrative review is an informal process whereby DHS and the applicant or recipient attempts to resolve the issue. An individual who requests an administrative review may proceed to a fair hearing if he or she is not satisfied with the outcome of the administrative review. Recipients who request a fair hearing prior to the effective date of the adverse action may request that assistance continue at current levels pending the outcome of the fair hearing. A fair hearing may be requested after the effective date of the adverse action, but assistance cannot be continued pending the fair hearing decision.
- j) *Complaints:* Customers with complaints about services received by DHS may register all complaints with the Office of Performance Monitoring within the DHS/ESA.
- k) *Two-Month Community Service Requirement:* D.C. intends to opt out of the option to require participation in community service

employment on the part of a parent or caretaker receiving assistance under the program who, after receiving such assistance for two months, is not exempt from the work requirements and is not engaged in work.

- l) *Elder Care Training and Placement*: D.C. intends to serve these customers through the general TEP vendors contracted to provide services if they wish not to be exempt and receive employment services. D.C. will work to coordinate services to this population through a partnership between DHS as well as the D.C. Office on Aging.
- m) *Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Transaction restrictions*: D.C. prevents assistance provided under the TANF program from being used in EBT transactions in liquor stores, casino and adult-oriented entertainment establishments, in which performers disrobe or perform in an unclothed state for entertainment, in the following manner:
- D.C., on an annual basis, sends a notice to all households receiving a TANF benefit, advising them that the use of TANF funds through EBT transactions in liquor stores, casinos, and places for adult entertainment is prohibited. Customers will be advised that conducting one of these prohibited EBT transactions without reporting it to DHS will be viewed as a concealment in violation of the public assistance fraud provisions found at DC Official Code § 4-218-.01(c).

In February 2014, D.C. purchased a subscription to *The Fraud Navigator*. *The Fraud Navigator* is a service, established by FIS™ Government solutions to specifically address the requirements of Section 4004 of the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012. It allows the D.C.'s EBT provider to block transaction(s) at specific establishments based on the Merchant Category code, as well as specific ATM terminals. The contract modification was executed on April 15, 2014 and D.C. began blocking all merchant codes associated with businesses subject to this legislation on May 30, 2014. D.C. worked with FIS to identify applicable businesses and block the transactions. The methodology was tested by FIS and is also being utilized in several other states. D.C. is using the Fraud Navigator to block transactions at liquor stores, casinos and places for adult entertainment. It also allows D.C. to track activity and patterns, which should further reduce public assistance fraud. FIS provides a report of all blocked transactions to D.C. on a monthly basis.

D.C. has implemented the following policies to ensure access to benefits for all TANF customers:

- D.C. uses the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system in place of the paper-based welfare benefits issuance system. EBT allows TANF customers to access their benefits through automatic teller machines (ATM) and point-of-sale devices to electronically deliver cash assistance and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits throughout each Ward of D.C. There are eight (8) Wards in D.C. The entire city is linked by public transportation and each Ward has commercial banking establishments where funds can be accessed. DHS is able to review both the blocked transactions as well as the executed transactions. Should the blocked transactions become proportionally high (over 5% of the total transactions) D.C. will review access.
- D.C. covers the cost of any access charges and fees, thus making benefits easily accessible with no transactional costs. TANF customers are notified of the

accessibility with no transactional costs through DHS written policies, and DHS posts the information publicly online. DHS modified the Combined Application for Public Assistance to include notification about the restrictions on EBT usage.

- D.C. also has a contracted provider, United Planning Organization (UPO), with the responsibility of distributing EBT cards. D.C. mails EBT cards to the customers' homes, and UPO also has two storefront locations. Both are accessible by public transportation and are located in areas of D.C. which have higher concentrations of individuals receiving public benefits. The locations of the places to access the cards are listed on the DHS website and posted in public areas at each of the five (5) DHS public assistance eligibility service center locations located throughout D.C.

#### **SECTION 5: CERTIFICATION THAT THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WILL OPERATE A CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM**

D.C. certifies, D.C. will operate a child support enforcement program under the State Plan approved under Part D.

#### **SECTION 6: CERTIFICATION THAT THE STATE WILL OPERATE FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

D.C. certifies that, D.C. will operate a foster care and adoption assistance program under the State Plan approved under part E, and D.C. will take such actions as necessary to ensure the children receiving assistance under such part are eligible for medical assistance under the State Plan under Title XIX.

## **SECTION 7: CERTIFICATION THAT THE STATE WILL PROVIDE INDIANS WITH EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE.**

D.C. certifies that, D.C. will provide each member of an Indian tribe, who is domiciled in D.C. and is not eligible for assistance under a tribal family assistance plan approved under section 412 of the Social Security Act, with equitable access to assistance under the State program funded under this part attributable to funds provided by the Federal Government.

## **SECTION 8: CERTIFICATION OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM**

D.C. certifies that the DHS is the D.C. agency that will administer and supervise the TANF program.

### **Public Availability and Review:**

The D.C. TANF State Plan was made available for public review on January 7, 2021 on the DHS website at [www.dhs.dc.gov](http://www.dhs.dc.gov). DHS also notified local organizations about the open comment period via email and during bi-weekly advocate calls. D.C. will file an amended Plan should there be any comments which result in Plan modifications.

Public Comments: The TANF State Plan had a 45-day review period. During the 45-day public review period, DHS accepted comments on the TANF State Plan from the general public, including local advocate organizations. Comments were directed to Brian Campbell, Chief of Staff, Economic Security Administration, 64 New York Ave., NE, 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Washington DC 20002, email [Brian.Campbell@dc.gov](mailto:Brian.Campbell@dc.gov).

DHS's ongoing review of the TANF program includes the review and consideration of public comments along with the tracking of outcomes of the TANF Program. DHS will submit amendments to the State Plan on an as-needed basis.

DHS assures that comments are considered. DHS assures D.C.'s TANF plan is available to the public upon request.

## **SECTION 9: CERTIFICATION OF STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES TO ENSURE AGAINST PROGRAM FRAUD AND ABUSE**

D.C. certifies that it has established and is enforcing standards and procedures to ensure against program fraud and abuse, including standards and procedures concerning nepotism, conflicts of interest among individuals responsible for the administration and supervision of the D.C. program, kickbacks, and the use of political patronage.

## **SECTION 10: OPTIONAL CERTIFICATION OF STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES TO ENSURE THAT THE STATE WILL SCREEN FOR AND IDENTIFY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

D.C. certifies that it will screen and identify individuals who receive assistance and who have a history of domestic violence while maintaining the confidentiality of such individuals. D.C. will refer such individuals to counseling and supportive services.

Individuals with a history of domestic violence may be exempted from work participation requirements and child support requirements. However, such individuals may choose to participate in work activities or pursue child support.

### **Explanation**

*Screening and Assessment*

DHS caseworkers use the TANF Comprehensive Assessment (TCA) to screen and assess all work-eligible applicants at initial application, and as necessary when there is an open TANF case, to identify and address various barriers to employment and work participation, including domestic violence. If current or historic evidence of domestic violence is identified, a written referral for additional screening or assessment services will be provided to the applicant or recipient who should comply with the instructions. The additional screening is completed by a domestic violence provider in D.C., trained in the prevention and treatment of victims of domestic violence. If an entity that operates a TANF work or education program discovers that a recipient has a domestic violence issue and may need services, that entity may contact DHS and a referral to the domestic violence service providers(s) will be made.

In the event that further screening or assessment confirms an initial finding of domestic violence, a plan of service is developed in conjunction with the applicant or as necessary when there is an open TANF case. When developing the plan of service, the possibility of requesting a waiver of work requirements and/or child support cooperation requirements and the duration of such waivers is discussed. Good cause waivers of work requirements are granted when work participation requirements work make it more difficult for the applicant or recipient to be secure from family violence.

#### *Decisions on Domestic Violence Waivers*

Decisions on granting or denying a domestic violence waiver of work requirements will be made within 15 business days of such a waiver request. During that time, if the applicant or recipient is otherwise eligible for TANF, financial assistance will not be delayed or denied. Because it may be necessary to waive work requirements to ensure the safety of the applicant or recipient, he or she will not be required to participate in work programs pending a decision on whether to grant a waiver.



When determining whether domestic violence occurred, the following evidence, among other factors, shall be considered:

- Police, government agency, or court records;
- Documentation from a shelter, legal, clerical, medical, or other professional worker from whom the applicant or recipient has sought assistance;
- Statements from other individuals with knowledge of the circumstances;
- Physical evidence of domestic violence or any other evidence supporting the allegations; and
- In the absence of evidence as listed above, allegations that the victim makes under oath, including the applicant's petition for Civil Protection Order, shall be sufficient to substantiate a claim.

If an applicant or recipient decides not to seek or declines services or a waiver of work requirements due to domestic violence, he or she will not be barred from seeking such services and waivers at a later date. An applicant or recipient may terminate an existing waiver at any time without penalty. No waiver will ever be implemented against the will of the applicant or recipient.

Once granted a waiver, any applicant or recipient who voluntarily chooses to participate in approved TANF activities shall be allowed to do so.

### *Child Support*

Information on the "good cause" reasons for failing to cooperate with child support requirements are provided to an applicant or recipient at application and

recertification for TANF benefits. The “good cause” reasons largely focus on domestic violence issues. This information is also provided directly by the D.C. Office of the Attorney General Child Support Services Division (CSSD). Applicants and recipients can indicate to their TANF caseworker their intent to claim “good cause” for failing to cooperate with child support requirements. That will alert CSSD that the customer wishes to claim “good cause”. The applicant or recipient can also indicate intent to claim “good cause” with CSSD directly. Ultimately, CSSD makes “good cause” determinations related to child support requirements.

## **SECTION 11: NON-DISCRIMINATION ASSURANCES**

D.C. assures that the following provisions of law will apply to programs and activities funded under TANF:

The Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. §§ 6101 *et seq.*)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794).

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 *et seq.*)

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d *et seq.*)

District of Columbia Human Rights Act of 1977 (D.C. Official Code §§ 2-1401.01 *et seq.*)

District of Columbia Language Access Act of 2004 (D.C. Official Code § 2-1931, *et seq.*)

D.C. assures that there will be services available to individual with disabilities as well as those for who may have limited proficiency in English.

## SECTION 12: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 1) D.C. intends to pursue the use of data matches with quarterly wage records and administrative records to determine the performance of State programs funded under this part.
- 2) D.C. may administer and provide services through contracts with charitable, religious, or public and private organizations, and may provide beneficiaries of the services with vouchers, certificates, or forms of disbursement which are redeemable with such organizations, or used as a means of providing assistance.
- 3) D.C. has chosen not to adopt the following:
  - a) The options to deny assistance to individuals convicted (under Federal or D.C. law) of any offense which is classified as a felony by the law of the jurisdiction involved and that has as an element the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance (D.C. Official Code § 4-205.71) (April 20, 1999);
  - b) The option to require a parent or caretaker receiving assistance under the program who, after receiving such assistance for two months is not exempt from work requirements and is not engaged in work, to participate in community service employment;
  - c) The option to sanction a family that includes an adult who is older than 20 years of age or younger than 51 years of age if such adult does not have, or is not working toward attaining, a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent unless certain exceptions are met;

4) TANF-Funded Programs

TANF Cash Assistance Program or Diversion Payment Program including:

- a) TAPIT and home visiting services are funded with TANF and are available only to TANF recipients.
- b) Diversion assistance is available only to individuals otherwise eligible for TANF cash assistance.
- c) Domestic Violence services and other non-cash grant services are available to TANF applicants up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level and TANF recipients.

Net Income must be less than Payment Level. Countable Resources must be less than the SNAP Resource Limit.

D.C. code also provides for an annual increase in the TANF cash grant based on the change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The average change since 1996 has been an increase of 2.4%. In addition to the annual increase, and in light of the fact that D.C.'s cash grant was largely stagnant since 1996, D.C. provided three cash grant increases, including 15.3% in FY 2017 and 13.3% in FY 2018 and, 11.8% in FY 2019. Grant increases were tied to a Cost of Living Increase thereafter. The Grant amounts for FY 2021 are in the table below:

<b>Group size</b>	<b>Payment Levels (effective since October 1, 2019)</b>
<b>1</b>	\$414
<b>2</b>	\$515
<b>3</b>	\$658
<b>4</b>	\$804
<b>5</b>	\$928
<b>6</b>	\$1,091
<b>7</b>	\$1,251
<b>8</b>	\$1,382
<b>9</b>	\$1,522
<b>10</b>	\$1,653

5) Other TANF Funded Services

- a) Literacy Services - Gross Income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
- b) Child Care - For the childcare subsidy program, income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
- c) Family Preservation Services - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
- d) Services to Teens in Foster Care - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
- e) Services to Teen Parents in Foster Care - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty level. No Resource Limit.

- f) Community Mini Grants - Grantees are required to use the funds to assist families with children with gross incomes below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- g) Fatherhood Initiative - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
- h) Family Emergency Services - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
- i) Wraparound Family Services - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
- j) Children's Services - Some of the programs funded will be for a purpose that falls within Section 401 (a)(3) or Section 401(a)(4) of the Social Security Act. In these cases, no income test is required. For programs funded by D.C. that do not fall within these purposes, the program must serve children, youth, or families with children whose incomes are below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- k) Preventing Repeat Pregnancies/Teen Pregnancy Prevention - These programs are not required to include a means test because they meet the third purpose of the TANF statute ("...prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies..."). However, programs are designed to serve low-income families; that is, those with incomes below 300% of the federal poverty level.
- l) Individual Development Accounts - Gross incomes must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.

- m) Services to Families with Youth involved with Juvenile Court who are in the community reuniting with their family - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
  - n) Services to Homeless Families - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
  - o) Subsidized Employment and Supported Employment - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
  - p) Housing - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
  - q) Earned Income Tax Credits - Gross income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. No Resource Limit.
- 5) MOE-Funded Segregated State Programs
- a) MOE funds are used to provide cash assistance under a Segregated State Program not subject to federal time limits on the receipt of assistance. Income and resource standards applied to the Segregated State Program mirror those applied to the TANF-funded cash assistance program as documented in Section (4) above.

This program supports eligible families with children under 12 months of ages who have exhausted their 12-month lifetime exemption from federal work participation requirements, but whom D.C. exempts from participating in work activities. Additionally, D.C.

supports families who have received TANF assistance for longer than 60 months who may or may not make good faith effort to participate in countable activities.

- b) D.C. will also support through the segregated state program customers who meet the federal work participation requirement, as well as those who do not meet the requirement, but are making a good faith effort, as measured by hour of participation in countable activities.

6) MOE-Funded Separate State Programs: D.C. does not provide cash assistance under an MOE-funded Separated State Program; however, it operates a segregated program and supports families with MOE funds for the following programs and initiatives:

- a) Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds may be used to provide child care subsidies to eligible low-income D.C. children whose parents are working or participating in TANF employment-related programs. These funds are used to provide subsidies to low-income working families and support quality enhancement initiatives. For the childcare subsidy program, income must be below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. In addition to that listed below, D.C. may use MOE funds for any services listed in Section 2B of this Plan.
- b) MOE funds may be used to support employment services for TANF recipients. Employment retention services are available for former TANF recipient up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- c) MOE funds may be commingled with federal TANF funds to fund basic cash assistance to families in the TANF program.



- d) MOE funds may be used to finance certain administrative and systems costs associated with the TANF program.

CERTIFICATION BY THE MAYOR OF  
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
IN SUPPORT OF THE TANF DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
STATE PLAN

The District of Columbia will operate a program to provide Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) so that the children may be cared for in their own homes or in homes of relatives or caregivers and to end dependence of needy able-bodied adults on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and pathway to the middle class.

The plan includes all required assurances and provisions to be implemented by the District of Columbia Department of Human Services. The named District Government agency has been given authority to administer and supervise the activities referenced in the state plan.

I hereby approve this TANF State Plan for the District of Columbia and submittal of this plan to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Muriel Bowser  
Mayor