The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: Responses to Frequently Asked Questions

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The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant funds a wide range of benefits and services for low-income families with children. TANF was created in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193). This report responds to some frequently asked questions about TANF; it does not describe TANF rules (see, instead, CRS Report RL32748, The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: A Primer on TANF Financing and Federal Requirements, by Gene Falk).

TANF Funding and Expenditures. TANF provides fixed funding for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the territories, and American Indian tribes. The basic block grant totals $16.5 billion per year. States are also required in total to contribute, from their own funds, at least $10.3 billion annually under a maintenance-of-effort (MOE) requirement. The basic block grant is not adjusted for changes in circumstances (e.g., inflation, population) over time. In FY2020, the TANF basic block grant was 38% below what its value (adjusting for inflation) was in FY1997.

Though TANF is best known for funding basic assistance payments for needy families with children, the block grant and MOE funds are used for a wide variety of benefits and activities. In FY2019, expenditures on basic assistance totaled $6.5 billion—21% of total federal TANF and MOE dollars. Basic assistance is often—but not exclusively—paid as cash and on an ongoing basis (monthly). In addition to funding basic assistance, TANF also contributes funds for child care, employment services (for both assistance recipients and others), state refundable tax credits for low income families, pre-Kindergarten and Head Start programs, and services for children who have been, or are at risk of being, abused and neglected. Some states also count expenditures in prekindergarten programs toward the MOE requirement.

The TANF Assistance Caseload. A total of 1.1 million families, composed of 2.9 million recipients, received TANF- or MOE-funded assistance in June 2020. The bulk of the “recipients” were children—2.1 million in that month. The assistance caseload is heterogeneous. The type of family once thought of as the “typical” assistance family—one with an unemployed adult recipient—accounted for 32% of all families on the rolls in FY2019. Additionally, 26% of cash assistance families had an employed adult, while 42% of all TANF families were “child-only” and had no adult recipient. Child-only families include those with disabled adults receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), adults who are nonparents (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles) caring for children, and families consisting of citizen children and ineligible noncitizen parents.

Assistance Benefits. TANF assistance benefit amounts are set by states. In July 2018, the maximum monthly benefit for a family of three ranged from $1,039 in New Hampshire to $170 in Mississippi. Only New Hampshire (at 60% of the federal poverty guidelines) had a maximum TANF assistance amount for this sized family in excess of 50% of poverty-level income.

Work Requirements. TANF’s main federal work requirement is a performance measure that applies to the states. States determine the work rules that apply to individual recipients. TANF law requires states to engage 50% of all families and 90% of two-parent families with work-eligible individuals in work activities, though these standards can be reduced by “credits.” Therefore, the effective standards states face are often less than the 50% or 90% targets, and vary by state. In FY2019, states achieved, on average, an all-family participation rate of 47.1% and a two-parent rate of 54.8%. In FY2019, only Montana did not meet the all-family participation standard and five jurisdictions (California, Montana, Nevada, Rhode Island, and Wyoming) did not meet the two-parent standard.

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is likely to affect states’ ability to meet TANF work standards. These standards are in statute and cannot be waived other than through legislation. However, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) can waive financial penalties for states that do not meet standards. In policy guidance, HHS has said it would use its authority to provide relief from the penalty for not meeting work standards “to the maximum extent possible.”
Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
Funding and Expenditures .......................................................................................... 1
  What Is TANF’s Funding Status? ........................................................................... 1
  How Are State TANF Programs Funded? ............................................................... 1
  How Much Has the Value of the TANF Basic Block Grant Changed Over Time? .... 1
  How Have States Used TANF Funds? ..................................................................... 2
  How Much of the TANF Grant Has Gone Unspent? .............................................. 3
The Caseload .............................................................................................................. 4
  How Many Families Receive TANF- or MOE-Funded Benefits and Services? ...... 4
  How Many Families and People Currently Receive TANF- or MOE-Funded Assistance? .......................................................... 4
  How Does the Current Assistance Caseload Level Compare with Historical Levels? 5
  What Are the Characteristics of Families Receiving TANF Assistance? ............... 6
TANF Cash Benefits: How Much Does a Family Receive in TANF Cash Per Month? 7
TANF Work Participation Standards ...................................................................... 8
  What Is the TANF Work Participation Standard States Must Meet? ...................... 8
  Have There Been Changes in the Work Participation Rules Enacted Since the 1996 Welfare Reform Law? ......................................................... 9
  What Work Participation Rates Have the States Achieved? ................................ 9
  How Many Jurisdictions Did Not Meet TANF Work Standards in FY2019? ......... 10
  How Might the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect the Ability of States to Meet TANF Work Standards? .......................................................... 11

Figures

Figure 1. Uses of TANF Funds by Spending Category, FY2019 .................................... 3
Figure 2. Number of Families Receiving Assistance, July 1959 to June 2020 ............... 5
Figure 3. Composition of the AFDC/TANF Assistance Caseload by Family Type:
  Selected Year FY1988 to FY2019 ....................................................................... 7
Figure 4. TANF Cash Assistance Maximum Monthly Benefit Amounts for a Single-
  Parent Family with Two Children, 50 States and the District of Columbia, July 2018 .... 8
Figure 5. National Average TANF Work Participation Rate for All Families, FY2002-
  FY2019 ............................................................................................................. 10

Tables

Table 1. TANF Basic Block Grant Funding in Nominal and Constant Dollars ................ 2
Table 2. The TANF Assistance Caseload, June 2020 ................................................. 4
Table A-1. Trends in the Cash Assistance Caseload: 1961-2019 ................................. 12
Table A-2. Families Receiving AFDC/TANF Assistance by Family Category, Selected
  Years, FY1988-FY2019 ...................................................................................... 14
The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

Table B-1. Use of FY2019 TANF and MOE Funds by Category ........................................... 15
Table B-2. Uses of FY2018 TANF and MOE Funds by Category as a Percentage of Total Federal TANF and State MOE Spending ........................................................................... 18
Table B-3. Unspent TANF Funds at the End of FY2019 ......................................................... 21
Table B-4. Number of Families, Recipients, Children, and Adults Receiving TANF Assistance by Jurisdiction, June 2020 ................................................................. 22
Table B-5. Number of Needy Families with Children Receiving Assistance by Jurisdiction, June of Selected Years ................................................................. 24
Table B-6. TANF Assistance Families by Number of Parents by Jurisdiction: June 2020 ........ 26
Table B-7. TANF Work Participation Standard and Rate, By Jurisdiction, for All Families: FY2019 ........................................................................................................ 28
Table B-8. TANF Work Participation Standard and Rate, By Jurisdiction, for Two-Parent Families: FY2019 ......................................................................................... 29

Appendixes

Appendix A. Supplementary Tables .................................................................................. 12
Appendix B. State Tables .................................................................................................. 15

Contacts

Author Information ........................................................................................................... 31
Introduction

This report provides responses to frequently asked questions about the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. It is intended to serve as a quick reference to provide easy access to information and data. Appendix A provides additional data on families receiving TANF assistance over time. Appendix B presents a series of tables with state-level data on TANF expenditures and families receiving assistance.

This report does not provide information on TANF program rules (for a discussion of TANF rules, see CRS Report RL32748, The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: A Primer on TANF Financing and Federal Requirements, by Gene Falk).

Funding and Expenditures

What Is TANF’s Funding Status?


How Are State TANF Programs Funded?

TANF programs are funded through a combination of federal and state funds. In FY2018, TANF has two federal grants to states. The bulk of the TANF funding is in a basic block grant to the states, totaling $16.5 billion for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and American Indian tribes. There is also a contingency fund available that provides extra federal funds to states that meet certain conditions.

Additionally, states are required to expend a minimum amount of their own funds for TANF and TANF-related activities under what is known as the maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement. States are required to spend at least 75% of what they spent in FY1994 on TANF’s predecessor programs. The minimum MOE amount, in total, is $10.3 billion per year for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the territories.

How Much Has the Value of the TANF Basic Block Grant Changed Over Time?

TANF was created by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA, P.L. 104-193). A TANF basic block grant amount—both nationally and for each state—was established in the 1996 law. That amount for the 50 states, District of Columbia, territories, and tribes was $16.6 billion in total. From FY1997 through FY2016, that amount remained the same. The basic block grant was not adjusted for changes that occur over time, such as inflation, the size of the TANF assistance caseload, or changes in the poverty population. During this period, the real (inflation-adjusted) value of the block grant declined by one-third (33.1%). Beginning with FY2017, the state family assistance grant was reduced by 0.33% from its historical levels to finance TANF-related research and technical assistance. The reduced block grant amount is $16.5 billion.

Table 1 shows the state family assistance grant, in both nominal (actual) and real (inflation-adjusted) dollars for each year, FY1997 through FY2020. In real (inflation-adjusted) terms, the FY2020 block grant was 38% below its value in FY1997.
Table 1. TANF Basic Block Grant Funding in Nominal and Constant Dollars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>State Family Assistance Grant: 50 States, DC, Tribes, and Territories</th>
<th>State Family Assistance Grant Constant 1997 dollars</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>$16.567</td>
<td>$16.567</td>
<td>-1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>15.991</td>
<td>-6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>15.020</td>
<td>-10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>14.792</td>
<td>-12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>14.124</td>
<td>-17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>13.680</td>
<td>-20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>13.190</td>
<td>-22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>12.345</td>
<td>-25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>12.382</td>
<td>-25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>11.859</td>
<td>-28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>11.585</td>
<td>-30.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>11.394</td>
<td>-31.2</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>11.217</td>
<td>-32.3</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>11.179</td>
<td>-32.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16.567</td>
<td>11.082</td>
<td>-33.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>16.512</td>
<td>10.820</td>
<td>-34.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>16.512</td>
<td>10.564</td>
<td>-36.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>16.512</td>
<td>10.372</td>
<td>-37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>16.512</td>
<td>10.224</td>
<td>-38.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Notes: Constant dollars were computed using the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers (CPI-U).

How Have States Used TANF Funds?

In FY2019, a total of $30.9 billion of both federal TANF and state MOE expenditures were either expended or transferred to other block grant programs. Basic assistance—ongoing benefits to families to meet basic needs—represented 21% ($6.5 billion) of total FY2019 TANF and MOE dollars.
TANF is a major contributor of child care funding. In FY2019, $5.0 billion (16% of all TANF and MOE funds) were either expended on child care or transferred to the child care block grant (the Child Care and Development Fund, or CCDF). TANF work-related activities (including education and training) were the third-largest TANF and MOE spending category at $3.2 billion, or 10% of total TANF and MOE funds. TANF also helps low-wage parents by helping to finance state refundable tax credits, such as state add-ons to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). TANF and MOE expenditures on refundable tax credits in FY2019 totaled $2.8 billion, or 9% of total TANF and MOE spending.

TANF and MOE funds also help fund state prekindergarten (pre-K) programs, with total FY2019 expenditures for that category at $2.6 billion. TANF is also a major contributor to the child welfare system, which provides foster care, adoption assistance, and services to families with children who either have experienced or are at risk of experiencing child abuse or neglect, spending about $2.6 billion on such activities. TANF and MOE funds are also used for short-term and emergency benefits and a wide range of other social services. Figure 1 shows the uses of federal TANF grants to states and state MOE funds in FY2019.

**Figure 1. Uses of TANF Funds by Spending Category, FY2019**

(Dollars in Billions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Assistance</td>
<td>$6.5B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
<td>$5.0B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work, Education and Training</td>
<td>$3.2B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refundable Tax Credit</td>
<td>$2.8B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K/Head Start</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare</td>
<td>$2.6B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>$2.2B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency and Short-Term Benefits</td>
<td>$1.3B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>$4.6B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Notes:** Detail may not add to totals because of rounding. Excludes TANF funds used in the territories and in tribal TANF programs.

For state-specific information on the use of TANF funds, see Table B-1 and Table B-2.

**How Much of the TANF Grant Has Gone Unspent?**

TANF law permits states to “reserve” unused funds without time limit. This permits flexibility in timing of the use of TANF funds, including the ability to “save” funds for unexpected occurrences that might increase costs (such as recessions or natural disasters).

At the end of FY2019 (September 30, 2019, the most recent data currently available), a total of $5.8 billion of federal TANF funding remained neither transferred nor spent. However, some of these unspent funds represent monies that states had already committed to spend later. At the end of FY2019, states had made such commitments to spend—that is, had obligated—a total of $1.4 billion. At the end of FY2019, states had $4.5 billion of “unobligated balances.” These funds are
available to states to make new spending commitments. **Table B-3** shows unspent TANF funds by state.

## The Caseload

### How Many Families Receive TANF- or MOE-Funded Benefits and Services?

This number is not known. Federal TANF reporting requirements focus on families receiving only ongoing assistance. There is no complete reporting on families receiving other TANF benefits and services.

“Assistance” is defined as benefits provided to families to meet ongoing, basic needs.\(^1\) It is most often paid in cash. However, some states use TANF or MOE funds to provide an “earnings supplement” to working parents added to monthly Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) allotments. These earnings supplements are paid separately from the regular TANF cash assistance program. Additionally, TANF MOE dollars are used to fund food assistance for immigrants barred from regular SNAP benefits in certain states. These forms of nutrition aid meet an ongoing need, and thus are considered TANF assistance.

As discussed in a previous section of this report, TANF basic assistance accounts for about 21% of all TANF expenditures. Therefore, the federal reporting requirements that pertain to families receiving assistance are likely to undercount the number of families receiving any TANF-funded benefit or service.

### How Many Families and People Currently Receive TANF- or MOE-Funded Assistance?

**Table 2** provides assistance caseload information. A total of 1.1 million families, composed of 2.9 million recipients, received TANF- or MOE-funded assistance in June 2020. The bulk of the “recipients” were children—2.1 million in that month. For state-by-state assistance caseloads, see **Table B-4**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. The TANF Assistance Caseload, June 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,120,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,930,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,132,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>797,744</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Notes:** TANF assistance caseload data exclude South Dakota. Data for South Dakota were not reported. TANF assistance caseload includes families receiving assistance in state-funded programs counted toward the TANF maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement.

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\(^1\) The definition of TANF assistance is not in statute. However, because the statutory language has most TANF requirements triggered by a family receiving “assistance,” the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulations define assistance at 45 C.F.R. §260.31.
How Does the Current Assistance Caseload Level Compare with Historical Levels?

Figure 2 provides a long-term historical perspective on the number of families receiving assistance from TANF or its predecessor program, from July 1959 to June 2020. The shaded areas of the figure represent months when the national economy was in recession. Though the health of the national economy has affected the trend in the cash assistance caseload, the long-term trend in receipt of cash assistance does not follow a classic countercyclical pattern. Such a pattern would have the caseload rise during economic slumps, and then fall again during periods of economic growth. Factors other than the health of the economy (demographic trends, policy changes) also have influenced the caseload trend.

The figure shows two periods of sustained caseload increases: the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s and a second period from 1988 to 1994. The number of families receiving assistance peaked in March 1994 at 5.1 million families. The assistance caseload fell rapidly in the late 1990s, after PRWORA, before leveling off in 2001. In 2004, the caseload began another decline, albeit at a slower pace than in the late 1990s. During the 2007-2009 recession and its aftermath, the caseload began to rise from 1.7 million families in August 2008, peaking in December 2010 at close to 2.0 million families. The number of families receiving assistance declined by almost half (to a little over 1 million families) during the long economic expansion of 2010 through 2019.

In June 2020, the number of families receiving assistance was reported at 1.1 million families, about 4% up from its level in December 2019.

Figure 2. Number of Families Receiving Assistance, July 1959 to June 2020

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), with data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Notes: Shaded areas denote months when the national economy was in recession. Information represents families receiving cash assistance from Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and TANF. For October 1999 through September 2019, includes families receiving assistance from Separate State Programs (SSPs) with expenditures countable toward the TANF maintenance of effort requirement. See Table A-I for average annual data on families, recipients, adult recipients, and child recipients of ADC, AFDC, and TANF cash assistance for 1961 to 2019. Note that data for January-March 2020 exclude Virginia; data for April-June 2020 exclude South Dakota.
Table B-5 shows recent trends in the number of cash assistance families by state.

What Are the Characteristics of Families Receiving TANF Assistance?

Before PRWORA, the “typical” family receiving assistance had been headed by a single parent (usually the mother) with one or two children. That single parent had also typically been unemployed. However, since 1996, the assistance caseload decline has occurred together with a major shift in the composition of the rolls.

Figure 3 shows the change in the size and composition of the assistance caseload under both AFDC (1988 and 1994) and TANF. In FY1988, an estimated 84% of AFDC families were headed by an unemployed adult recipient. In FY2019, families with an unemployed adult recipient represented 32% of all cash assistance families. This decline occurred, in large part, as the number of families headed by unemployed adult recipients declined more rapidly than other components of the assistance caseload. In FY1994, a monthly average of 3.8 million families per month who received AFDC cash assistance had adult recipients who were not working. In FY2019, a monthly average of 359,000 families per month had adult recipients or work-eligible individuals, with no adult recipient or work-eligible individual working.

With the decline in families headed by unemployed adults, the share of the caseload represented by families with employed adults and “child-only” families has increased. The first category includes families in “earnings supplement” programs separate from the regular TANF cash assistance program. In FY2019, families with an employed adult comprised 26% of all TANF families.

Child-only TANF families are those where no adult recipient receives benefits in their own right; the family receives benefits on behalf of its children. The share of the caseload that was child-only in FY2019 was 42%. In FY2019, families with a nonrecipient, nonparent relative (grandparents, aunts, uncles) represented 17% of all assistance families. Families with ineligible, noncitizen adults or adults who have not reported their citizenship status made up 10% of the assistance caseload in that year. Families where the parent received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and the children received TANF made up 9% of all assistance families in FY2019.
The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

Figure 3. Composition of the AFDC/TANF Assistance Caseload by Family Type: Selected Year FY1988 to FY2019

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS) tabulations of the TANF national data files.
Notes: TANF assistance caseload includes families receiving assistance in state-funded programs counted toward the TANF maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement.

TANF Cash Benefits: How Much Does a Family Receive in TANF Cash Per Month?

There are no federal rules that help determine the amount of TANF cash benefits paid to a family. (There are also no federal rules that require states to use TANF to pay cash benefits, though all states do so.) Benefit amounts are determined solely by the states.

Most states base TANF cash benefit amounts on family size, paying larger cash benefits to larger families on the presumption that they have greater financial needs. The maximum monthly cash benefit is usually paid to a family that receives no other income (e.g., no earned or unearned income) and complies with program rules. Families with income other than TANF often are paid a reduced benefit. Moreover, some families are financially sanctioned for not meeting a program requirement (e.g., a work requirement), and are also paid a lower benefit.

Figure 4 shows the maximum monthly TANF cash benefit by state for a single parent caring for two children (family of three) in July 2018. The benefit amounts shown are those for a single-parent family with two children. For a family of three, the maximum TANF benefit paid in July

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2 States are not required to report to the federal government their cash assistance benefit amounts in either the TANF state plan (under Section 402 of the Social Security Act) or in annual program reports (under Section 411 of the Social Security Act). The benefit amounts shown are from the “Welfare Rules Database,” maintained by the Urban Institute and funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

3 Some states vary their benefit amounts for other family types such as two-parent families or “child-only” cases. States also vary their benefits by other factors such as housing costs and substate geography.
2018 varied from $170 per month in Mississippi to $1,039 per month in New Hampshire. The map shows a regional pattern to the maximum monthly benefit paid, with lower benefit amounts in the South than in other regions. Only New Hampshire (at 60% of the federal poverty guidelines) had a maximum TANF cash assistance amount for this sized family in excess of 50% of poverty-level income.

**Figure 4. TANF Cash Assistance Maximum Monthly Benefit Amounts for a Single-Parent Family with Two Children, 50 States and the District of Columbia, July 2018**

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the Urban Institute's Welfare Rules Database. The welfare rules database has information for the 50 states and District of Columbia. It does not have information on TANF assistance programs in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands or tribal TANF programs.

**TANF Work Participation Standards**

TANF’s main federal work requirement is actually a performance measure that applies to the states, rather than individual recipients. States determine the work rules that apply to individual recipients.

**What Is the TANF Work Participation Standard States Must Meet?**

The TANF statute requires states to have 50% of their caseload meet standards of participation in work or activities—that is, a family member must be in specified activities for a minimum number of hours. There is a separate participation standard that applies to the two-parent portion

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4 In 2018, the HHS poverty guidelines for the contiguous 48 states and the District of Columbia for a family of three was $1,732 per month. Higher poverty lines applied in Alaska ($2,165 per month for a family of three) and Hawaii ($1,992 per month for a family of three).

5 Families without a work-eligible individual are excluded from the participation rate calculation. It excludes families...
of a state’s caseload, requiring 90% of the state’s two-parent caseload to meet participation standards.

However, the statutory work participation standards are reduced by a “caseload reduction credit.” The caseload reduction credit reduces the participation standard one percentage point for each percentage point decline in a state’s caseload. Additionally, under a regulatory provision, a state may get “extra” credit for caseload reduction if it spends more than required under the TANF MOE. Therefore, the effective standards states face are often less than the 50% and 90% targets, and vary by state and by year.

States that do not meet the TANF work participation standard are at risk of being penalized through a reduction in their block grant. However, penalties can be forgiven if a state claims, and the Secretary of HHS finds, that it had “reasonable cause” for not meeting the standard. Penalties can also be forgiven for states that enter into “corrective compliance plans,” and subsequently meet the work standard.

**Have There Been Changes in the Work Participation Rules Enacted Since the 1996 Welfare Reform Law?**

The 50% and 90% target standards that states face, as well as the caseload reduction credit, date back to the 1996 welfare reform law. However, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA, P.L. 109-171) made several changes to the work participation rules effective in FY2007.

- The caseload reduction credit was changed to measure caseload reduction from FY2005, rather than the original law’s FY1995.
- The work participation standards were broadened to include families receiving cash aid in “separate state programs.” Separate state programs are programs run with state funds, distinct from a state’s “TANF program,” but with expenditures countable toward the TANF MOE.
- HHS was instructed to provide definition to the allowable TANF work activities listed in law. HHS was also required to define what is meant by a “work-eligible” individual, expanding the number of families that are included in the work participation calculation.
- States were required to develop plans and procedures to verify work activities.


**What Work Participation Rates Have the States Achieved?**

HHS computes two work participation rates for each state that are then compared with the effective (after-credit) standard to determine if it has met the TANF work standard. An “all-families” work participation rate is computed and compared with the all-families effective standard (50% minus the state’s caseload reduction credit). HHS also computes a two-parent

where the parent is a nonrecipient (for example, disabled receiving Supplemental Security Income or an ineligible noncitizen) or the children in the family are being cared for by a nonparent relative (e.g., grandparent, aunt, uncle) who does not receive assistance on his or her behalf.
The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

The work participation rate that is compared with the two-parent effective standard (90% minus the state’s caseload reduction credit).

**Figure 5** shows the national average all-families work participation rate for FY2002 through FY2019. For the period FY2002 through FY2011, states achieved an average all-families work participation rate hovering around 30%. The work participation rate increased since then. In FY2016, it exceeded 50% for the first time since TANF was established. However, it is important to note that the increase in the work participation rate has not come from an increase in the number of recipients in regular TANF assistance programs who are either working or in job preparation activities. This increase stems mostly from states creating new “earnings supplement” programs that use TANF funds to aid working parents in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) or who have left the regular TANF assistance programs for work.⁶

**Figure 5. National Average TANF Work Participation Rate for All Families, FY2002-FY2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**How Many Jurisdictions Did Not Meet TANF Work Standards in FY2019?**

In FY2019, Montana was the only jurisdiction that did not meet its TANF work participation standard for all families. Montana also did not meet its standard in FY2018. In terms of the higher two-parent standard, five jurisdictions did not meet it for FY2019: California, Montana, Nevada, Rhode Island, and Wyoming. **Table B-7** provides information for each jurisdiction on the TANF work standard, caseload reduction credit, and work participation rate for all families for FY2019. **Table B-8** provides that information for two-parent families.

⁶ See CRS In Focus IF10856, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: Work Requirements.
How Might the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect the Ability of States to Meet TANF Work Standards?

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to affect states’ ability to meet their work participation standards. Employment losses, disruptions in education, and the inability of states to engage recipients in group activities (e.g., job clubs) could all result in lower participation in work or job preparation activities. Additionally, if the economic dislocation results in higher assistance caseloads, a state’s caseload reduction credit would be reduced, resulting in a higher effective (after-credit) participation standard for the state to meet.

The rules governing the TANF work participation standards cannot be waived, other than through new legislation. However, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has the ability to reduce or waive the penalty on states for failing to meet the TANF work participation standard. HHS has said that it would exercise its authority to provide states with relief from the penalty for not meeting participation standards “to the maximum extent possible.”

---

## Appendix A. Supplementary Tables

### Table A-1. Trends in the Cash Assistance Caseload: 1961-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Families (millions)</th>
<th>Recipients (millions)</th>
<th>Adults (millions)</th>
<th>Children (millions)</th>
<th>TANF Child Recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>As a Percentage of All Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>3.363</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>2.598</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td>3.704</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>2.844</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td>3.945</td>
<td>0.988</td>
<td>2.957</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
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<td>4.195</td>
<td>1.050</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
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<td>1.101</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
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<td>1.243</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.039</td>
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<td>11.015</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
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<td>3.188</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
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<td>3.130</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Recipients (millions)</td>
<td>Adults (millions)</td>
<td>Children (millions)</td>
<td>As a Percentage of All Children</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>4.1</td>
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<td>1.149</td>
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<td>3.780</td>
<td>1.037</td>
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<td>3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1.358</td>
<td>3.516</td>
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<td>2019</td>
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<td>2.199</td>
<td>2.9</td>
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</table>

**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Census Bureau.

**Notes:** NA denotes not available. During transition reporting from AFDC to TANF, caseload statistics on adult and child recipients were not collected. For those years, TANF children as a percent of all children and percent of all poor children were estimated by HHS and published in Welfare Indicators and Risk Factors, Annual Report to Congress, Table TANF 2, p. A-7. See http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/14/indicators/rpt_indicators.pdf. For 2019, the ratio of TANF recipient children to all children in poverty might be overstated. This is because child poverty might have been underestimated, as responses to the survey used to estimate poverty were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Category</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Recipient or Work-Eligible Parent/Not Working</td>
<td>3,136,566</td>
<td>3,798,997</td>
<td>879,922</td>
<td>358,761</td>
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<tr>
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<td>243,573</td>
<td>378,620</td>
<td>287,146</td>
<td>286,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Only/SSI Parent</td>
<td>59,988</td>
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<td>181,852</td>
<td>104,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Only/Noncitizen Parent</td>
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<td>184,397</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Only/Other Ineligible Parent</td>
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<td>146,227</td>
<td>4,968</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Only/Caretaker Relative</td>
<td>188,598</td>
<td>328,290</td>
<td>254,088</td>
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<td>19,897</td>
<td>38,341</td>
<td>84,378</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
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<td><strong>5,046,263</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,909,841</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,120,407</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Category</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Recipient or Work-Eligible Parent/Not Working</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>7.5%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Only/SSI Parent</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Only/Noncitizen Parent</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Child-Only/Other Ineligible Parent</td>
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<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
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<td>6.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
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<td>0.8%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS) tabulations of the FY1988 and FY1994 AFDC Quality Control (QC) data files and the FY2010 and FY2019 TANF National Data Files.

**Notes:** FY2010 and FY2019 data include families receiving assistance from separate state programs (SSPs) with expenditures countable toward the TANF maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement.
## Appendix B. State Tables

### Table B-1. Use of FY2019 TANF and MOE Funds by Category

($ in Billions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Basic Assistance</th>
<th>Child Care</th>
<th>Work, Education, and Training</th>
<th>Refundable Tax Credits</th>
<th>Pre-K/Head Start</th>
<th>Child Welfare</th>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Emergency and Short-Term Benefits</th>
<th>Other Benefits and Services</th>
<th>Total Spending</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>$17.263</td>
<td>$5.524</td>
<td>$7.500</td>
<td>$0.000</td>
<td>$22.005</td>
<td>$38.271</td>
<td>$12.855</td>
<td>$38.280</td>
<td>$35.228</td>
<td>$176.926</td>
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<tr>
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<td>37.176</td>
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<td>10.152</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>221.345</td>
<td>15.911</td>
<td>26.535</td>
<td>48.201</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.682</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>211.345</td>
<td>15.911</td>
<td>26.535</td>
<td>48.201</td>
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<td>Emergency and Short-Term Benefits</td>
<td>Other Benefits and Services</td>
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Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Notes: Excludes TANF funds used in the territories and in tribal TANF programs.
Table B-2. Uses of FY2018 TANF and MOE Funds by Category as a Percentage of Total Federal TANF and State MOE Spending

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<th>State</th>
<th>Basic Assistance</th>
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<th>Pre-K/Head Start</th>
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<th>Administration</th>
<th>Emergency and Short-Term Benefits</th>
<th>Other Benefits and Services</th>
<th>Total Spending</th>
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<td>21.6%</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>61.0%</td>
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**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Notes:** Excludes TANF funds used in the territories and in tribal TANF programs.
### Table B-3. Unspent TANF Funds at the End of FY2019
(September 30, 2019; $ in Millions)

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### The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

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**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Notes:** Excludes TANF funds used in the territories and in tribal TANF programs.

### Table B-4. Number of Families, Recipients, Children, and Adults Receiving TANF Assistance by Jurisdiction, June 2020

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### The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

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The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

Congressional Research Service

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**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Notes:** NA denotes not available. June 2020 data for South Dakota were not reported. TANF cash assistance caseload includes families receiving assistance in state-funded programs counted toward the TANF maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement.

**Table B-5. Number of Needy Families with Children Receiving Assistance by Jurisdiction, June of Selected Years**

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The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

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**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Notes:** NA denotes not available. June 2020 data for South Dakota were not reported. Percentage changes from 1994 and 2019 also exclude data from South Dakota for those years. TANF cash assistance caseload includes families receiving assistance in state-funded programs counted toward the TANF maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement.

Table B-6. TANF Assistance Families by Number of Parents by Jurisdiction: June 2020

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<th>State</th>
<th>Single Parent</th>
<th>Two Parent</th>
<th>No Parent</th>
<th>Total Families</th>
<th>Single Parent</th>
<th>Two Parent</th>
<th>No Parent</th>
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<td>11.1</td>
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## The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

### Table: Families Receiving TANF Cash Assistance by State (June 2020)

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<th>No Parent</th>
<th>Total Families</th>
<th>Single Parent</th>
<th>Two Parent</th>
<th>No Parent</th>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td><strong>52.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.6</strong></td>
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</table>

**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Notes:** NA denotes not available. June 2020 data for South Dakota were not reported. TANF cash assistance caseload includes families receiving assistance in state-funded programs counted toward the TANF maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement.
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<th>State</th>
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<th>Caseload Reduction Credit</th>
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<tr>
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### Table B-8. TANF Work Participation Standard and Rate, By Jurisdiction, for Two-Parent Families: FY2019

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<th>State</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Caseload Reduction Credit</th>
<th>Effective (After Credit) Standard</th>
<th>Work Participation Rate</th>
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*Source:* Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

a. State did not meet its work participation standard.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Caseload Reduction Credit</th>
<th>Effective (After Credit) Standard</th>
<th>Work Participation Rate</th>
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### The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: FAQs

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<th>Work Participation Rate</th>
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**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Note:** NA = jurisdiction does not serve two-parent families in its TANF assistance program.

a. State did not meet its two-parent family work participation standard.

---

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Gene Falk  
Specialist in Social Policy  
Patrick A. Landers  
Analyst in Social Policy
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Amber Wilhelm and Calvin DeSouza produced this report’s data visualizations.

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