

TANF Surplus to Help Children in the State of Tennessee

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Topic of Focus.....	6
Policy Description.....	6
Policy Context.....	7
Importance.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Researching the Issue and Literature Review.....	9
Nature of the Current Policy.....	9
Contextual Factors.....	11
Welfare from Creation to the 1960s.....	11
Welfare from the 1990s to 2013.....	12
Welfare from 2019 to Now.....	14
Policy Impact.....	15
Future Direction.....	16
Issues at Hand.....	16
Looking Ahead.....	16

Presentation of the Brand and Support Mapping.....	18
Framework of the Brand.....	18
Support and Opposition Map.....	19
Persuasive Arguments.....	20
Notes on Opposition.....	21
Plans to Form a Coalition.....	21
Logical Partners.....	21
Odd Bedfellows.....	22
Media Campaign.....	23
Campaign Goals.....	23
Media Avenues.....	24
Media Content.....	24
Implementation Steps.....	25
Advocacy Plan.....	26
Focus and Beneficiaries.....	26
Advocacy Strategies.....	26
Advocacy Strategies Useful for Poverty.....	27

Involvement of Beneficiaries.....27

Potential Ramifications.....28

 Positive Ramifications.....28

 Negative Ramifications.....28

Potential Opposition.....29

Elected Officials to Approach.....30

Main Talking Points.....32

Plan to Monitor Progress.....32

Conclusion.....33

References.....34

Appendix A.....41

Appendix B.....42

Appendix C.....43

Appendix D.....44

Appendix E.....45

Appendix F.....47

Appendix G.....48

Abstract

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, also known as TANF, is a program that has been in place for 25 years. TANF provides states a certain amount of money to be able to assist low-income families, within their state. Many individuals know of TANF since it does provide certain cash assistance to families that are low-income and have applied and been approved to receive this assistance on a month-to-month basis. The past few years there has been a decrease of cash assistance that has been given to families. Tennessee is the state that has received attention due to having reserved \$700 million that has been unused to the families who receive TANF.

Keywords: TANF, low-income, cash assistance, surplus funds, Tennessee

Topic of Focus

Policy Description

Poverty is something that is faced throughout the community, it affects families in many ways in which it can be too difficult for them to work towards self-sufficiency. Families that are considered low income then rely on other programs that would be beneficial to their families, which will be able to bring a bit of income into the household. That is why this campaign is focusing on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families policy, also known as TANF, in Tennessee. According to the Digital Communications Division on the HHS.gov website, there are four main goals of TANF. The first goal is to provide assistance to families that are in need to support children being well cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives. The second goal is to work towards ending families' need to be dependent on government benefits by promoting job, work, and marriage preparation. The third goal of TANF is to reduce and prevent the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies. The last goal of TANF is to encourage two-parent households. The primary issues that are addressed in this policy are poverty, unemployment, and self-sufficiency for families in need. TANF has certain requirements that need to be met to receive assistance. These include low income, being a U.S. citizen or have a green card, being either pregnant or have children, and both parents living together. Additional requirements include participating in a personal responsibility plan (PRP), keeping their children up to date on shots and doctor's appointments, keeping children in school, and working or participating in work training for 30 hours a week (Families First, n.d.).

The benefits of TANF are limited to 60 months within the lifetime of a participant (Families First Eligibility Information, Highlights, and Personal Responsibility Plans, n.d.). With this policy, once the family has been approved for services, they can receive a

monthly amount. As of today, the monthly amount a household can receive is \$245 which is among the lowest in the United States (Allison, 2021). House Bill 142 under Section 5 paragraph D has the Tennessee code § 71-3-105(f)(2). The code further explains that the average amount of monthly cash assistance can't surpass a total of \$677 for a family of three. This amount has lessened and lessened for the past 20 years. These cash benefits can be used for things such as groceries, paying bills, buying clothing, supplies for the house, transportation costs, and select medical supplies that are not covered under Medicaid (Tennessee TANF Program, n.d.). Additional benefits include assistance with work opportunities and job training to help individuals be qualified for jobs.

These policies impact families who are pregnant and have no other children or have children under the age of 18 and do not have sufficient funds to provide for their children. In most states, individuals who apply for TANF must meet the eligibility criteria as well as have assets at or below \$2,000 (What is TANF and How Does It Work, 2021). In 2016, a study was done with the goal of answering the question "Do limits on family assets affect participation in, costs of TANF?" (Ali, 2016). It was found that there was no advantage for caseload burdens or cost to keep the TANF asset limits in place. Due to the asset limit criteria in TANF, an unintended consequence is that families are oftentimes forced to "spend down resources" in order to be able to access TANF benefits (Ali, 2016). This policy has support from the Republican party as well as from the Democratic party.

Policy Context

The state of Tennessee has House Bill 142, which covers the Family First Program that falls under TANF. The bill further mentions the program and the requirements that are determined by each department (HB0142, 2021). House Bill 142 under Section 5 paragraph D

has the Tennessee code § 71-3-105(f)(2). The code further explains that the average amount of monthly cash assistance can't surpass a total of \$677 for a family of three. This amount has lessened and lessened for the past 20 years. As a group, we advocate changing this existing section under House bill 142, for the cash assistance to increase, which will then be of benefit to those households receiving TANF assistance.

Importance

There are several reasons why it is important to address this policy. Poverty and food insecurity have become an issue in most communities. 15.3% or more than 1 million people live in poverty and 12.4% or 336,000 households experienced food insecurity in Tennessee between 2016-2018. These figures are above the national averages of 13.1% (poverty) and 11.7% (food insecurity) (TN Justice Center, 2020). The nation's rural states like Tennessee, provide a vast majority of the country's food and energy, while also being the hub to important manufacturing companies. Despite their critical role, too many individuals and families in this state are struggling and not sharing in the country's economic growth (Morgan, 2018). From a social justice standpoint, all individuals and families have a right to not go hungry. Currently, though TANF is set up to benefit single-parent households, change needs to take place so that single college students who are on their own with no children and other populations that do not currently qualify can qualify for TANF. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "TANF and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) benefit together fail to lift a family of three out of poverty in every state" (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Huttman's Policy Analysis Model will be a model to apply for this issue. It begins with asking about unmet needs and the goals and outcomes of the policy, who benefits from this policy and the social equality of the group, and what can be improved of the policy for better social functioning. Next, the model focuses on policy implementations and the kind of assistance given. With this project, the target population is those families who are under TANF and receiving assistance from the program. It follows on stating if the policy is in accordance with research findings. For example, the TANF Surplus to Help Children in the State of Tennessee has research supporting that the cash assistance provided for families under TANF is not enough financial assistance when Tennessee has a surplus of \$700 million. This amount can go towards families to receive an increase in financial assistance. Lastly, Huttman's Policy Analysis Model goes over the interest groups who will and will not oppose this policy. The Positional Map (See Appendix A) goes over Legislators who will support this change of working towards increasing financial assistance. The map also focuses on other Legislators that can be on the opposing side. The TANF Surplus to Help Children in the State of Tennessee plans to consider this model presented for the benefit of the project.

Researching the Issue and Literature Review

Nature of the Current Policy

Poverty is a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living. Poverty means that the income level from employment is so low that basic human needs can't be met (Chen, 2019). Poverty status in the United States is assigned to people that do not meet a certain income threshold, which is set by the Department of Health and Human Services. Poverty rates in the United States and the

percentage of the U.S. population living in poverty are calculated by the U.S. [Bureau of Census](#) (Chen, 2019).

The poverty rate in Tennessee currently stands at 16.7%, which means 1 out of every 6 residents in Tennessee lives in poverty. In 2020, 1,072,360 of 6,436,601 residents reported income levels below the poverty line. Nationally the state of Tennessee ranks 41st, which is moderately higher than the national average of 14.6%. There are many subgroups who are affected by poverty in Tennessee, the group at the top of the list are Hispanic residents at 30.5%. The poverty rate of Hispanic residents is dramatically higher than the national average of 22.2%, 101,739 of 333,765 Hispanic Tennesseans live below the poverty line (Tennessee Poverty Rate, n.d.).

The second group that is more likely to be affected by poverty is black residents. The poverty rate for black residents in Tennessee currently stands at 27.1%. The poverty rate of black residents is the same as the national average, 288,306 of 1,065,419 black Tennesseans live below the poverty line (Tennessee Poverty Rate, n.d.).

The US government spends about \$668 billion a year on over 120 different welfare programs. Welfare statistics showed that in October 2018 about 2.15 million people received TANF with that number gradually dropping to 2 million in March of 2019, the number rose again due to COVID. In total, there are 2,132,800 TANF recipients that are children, this is by far the most worrying welfare fact. The statistics present a clear picture that American children are the most vulnerable group in the country. In the fiscal year of 2019, \$30.9 out of \$6.5 billion of the funds dedicated to TANF went to assistance while \$5 billion went to childcare (Petrovska, 2021).

Regardless of its cause or causes poverty has devastating consequences for the people who experience it. In general, children that grow up in poverty are more likely to be poor as adults, more likely to drop out of school, and more likely to have employment problems. Individuals experiencing poverty are at risk for family problems including divorce and domestic violence. The main reason for many of these problems is stress (The Consequences of Poverty, 2016). Health is perhaps another area where poor people suffer most. For instance, a large percentage of diseases in low-income countries are caused by the consequences of poverty such as low nutrition, indoor pollution, and lack of access to proper sanitation and health education (Borgen Project, 2018).

The plan to help low-income families in Tennessee is to propose an increase in funds from the TANF surplus that has accumulated over the years. TANF currently does not have a proposed bill to increase benefits for its recipients in the state of Tennessee. No other bills have been introduced to increase TANF benefits. An increase in cash assistance would prove beneficial to many families under the poverty line to help them afford their basic needs and maintain stability (Meyer & Floyd, 2020).

Contextual Factors

Welfare from Creation through 1960s

Although the term “TANF” was not officially created until 1996, the history of TANF goes all the way back to 1935 when the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program was created by the Social Security Act of 1935 (Learn about, n.d.). This program was designed to provide low-income families with financial assistance. The idea of welfare was originally brought into existence to help single mothers who were not able to provide for their families. At the time, women in the workforce were not an accepted thing. In addition, if women went to work, who

would care for and raise the children? Because of this, organizations such as the Aid to Dependent Children were created with the purpose of giving mothers the ability to stay home and raise their children (The Temporary, 2019).

However, while there were good intentions with this program, there were some issues as well. The ADC program had very rigorous restrictions and targeted specific household types where children were only supported by one parent and only for specific reasons (Learn about, n.d.). The only way that a child could get assistance was if they did not have support from a parent because of death, routine absence, or if the parent was physically or mentally incapacitated. The child, however, had to be living with the other parent or with a relative (The Temporary, 2019). Since at that time fathers were the ones that provided support for the family, the ADC was created to provide support for the mothers in absence of the fathers so that the women would not have to go to work to provide for their families. This excluded many families from receiving assistance because they did not fall into these specific requirements. In 1961, the ADC program changed its name to Aid to Families with Dependent Children or AFDC. The program also changed the requirement that only single-parent households could receive assistance. Now, two-parent households were eligible to receive financial assistance (Learn about, n.d.). However, the rigorous requirements still stayed the same excluding many needy families from receiving help.

Welfare from the 1990s to 2013

The year 1996 marked some big changes within the welfare system. The AFDC program was completely replaced by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program or TANF. The TANF program provided a much more structured and organized program that not only wanted children to be cared for, but also provided other services to help the families get jobs or

job training and get them back on their feet. One major change from AFDC to TANF was the time limitations of benefits. With AFDC, there were no time limits on cash assistance.

However, with TANF, a limit of 60 months was put in place to keep families accountable and get them back on their feet (The Temporary, 2019). There were also changes to how earnings were counted as well as different regulations on work and job activity participation (The Temporary, 2019). This change is often noted as the end of the welfare system as the world had known it because it transitioned from a program where families could receive benefits endlessly with little accountability to a program that was work-based and time limited. In turn, this allowed states to target poverty and child poverty in a much more effective way. The TANF program was created through a block grant to last through the year 2002 (Temporary Assistance, n.d.).

Over the years, TANF got extended multiple times. In 2005 through the Deficit Reduction Act, most TANF grants were extended through the year 2010. Other changes also included verifying the work activities of participants to ensure the requirements were being met (Learn about, n.d.). Due to the recession in 2007, an Emergency Contingency Fund (ECF) consisting of \$5 billion was established in 2009 to help reimburse states for the increased TANF funds that were being used (Temporary Assistance, n.d.). Additionally, states were given access to extend supplemental grants and reserve funds for benefits or services through the end of 2010. The requirements of TANF have changed again in 2012 with the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act. This act prevented TANF participants in each state from using their cash benefits at casinos, strip clubs, and liquor stores (Learn about, n.d.).

The unspent funds that states had saved up came in handy in 2013 when the government shut down and those saved resources were the only funds the states were receiving during the shutdown. TANF continues to operate to this day through short-term extensions, however, it is

important to note that there has not been an increase in the TANF block grant since it was created in 1996 (The Temporary, 2021). Due to inflation, the TANF block grant has lost 38% of its value (The Temporary, 2021). Recently, however, there have been some bills submitted into congress that have tried to enact change to TANF.

Welfare from 2019 to Now

In 2019, Congressman Darian LaHood from Washington D.C. introduced the Improving Access to Work Act (H.R. 1246). The Access to Work Act pushes for more accountability for the work program and requires states to spend 25% of their maintenance of effort funds on work activities (LaHood introduces, 2019). Congressman Darian LaHood from Washington D.C. was a major supporter in this campaign. This act did not pass but that did not deter Congressman Darian LaHood and his supporters. The act was resubmitted in 2020 and again in 2021. However, in the 2020 and 2021 sessions, H.R. 1247, the Supporting Work Through Apprenticeships Act was also submitted. The Supporting Work Through Apprenticeships Act, adds apprenticeships as a work activity accepted under TANF (LaHood introduces, 2019). Both H.R. 1246 and H.R. 1247 have been introduced but have not gotten any further along.

In Tennessee, a bill has been passed that aims to strengthen the TANF program. This is House Bill 142 which was introduced in January of 2021 by Representative William Lamberth and signed by the Governor and set to be effective July of 2021. Co-prime sponsors of this bill include Grant, Terry, Smith, Sherrell, Hawk, Sexton C, Love, Dixie, Cooper, along with 22 others (HB 0142, n.d.). There were no objectors to this bill being passed. This bill works to assist with childcare, transportation, job training, and employment activities that are supported under TANF (TN house, n.d.). This bill will also create a Families First Community Grant which will put \$50 million of TANF reserve funds into communities to assist low-income

families (TN house, n.d.). Lastly, this bill created a TANF Advisory Board which has been put in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the goals of this bill, select participants for the programs, and look for research partners to assist in evaluations (TN house, n.d.).

In addition to changes that have happened or are currently happening with TANF, there are some differing opinions about the TANF program. There has been a considerable amount of support for TANF over the years which has kept the program going as well as made improvements to it. However, there are also opposing opinions. Vallas and Boteach (2015) explained the top five reasons why the TANF model should not be followed for any additional programs that work within income assistance. Vallas and Boteach (2015) explained that TANF does not help very many families and children that are struggling, it does not respond in recessions, "...is not accountable for results", does not serve two-parent families efficiently, and is not effective in decreasing poverty. This argument emphasizes that this model should not be used as an example of income assistance programs. Instead, policymakers should work to fix the key issues that are preventing TANF from effectively benefiting the American people.

Policy Impact

The TANF program requirements have had an impact on key populations including families with children that have disabilities and minority families. Between 1996 and 2003 those families who were dependent on federal/state assistance for at least half of their income dropped by 3.4 million due largely in part to the new time limit restrictions (Parish, Rose, & Andrews, 2010).

These new requirements have had an impact on families with children with disabilities due in part to the work requirement. Finding affordable childcare for children with disabilities is difficult due in part to how much childcare costs and limited accessibility since most daycares do

not accept children with severe disabilities. For families that were cited for TANF violations, it is common that there is a child or children with disabilities in the home (Parish, Rose, & Andrews, 2010).

Two other key populations that have been impacted by the change from AFDC to TANF are the Black and Latino populations. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “about 41 percent of Black children live in states where the 10 or fewer families receive TANF for every 100 in poverty, compared to 33 percent of Latino children and 28 percent of white children.” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021) Another huge disparity they found is that in 1995 AFDC was able to lift almost 3 million children out of deep poverty compared to only 260,000 children on TANF in 2017 (Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021).

Research also showed in late June and July 2020, 19 million children lived in a household that wasn't getting enough to eat, that was behind on rent or mortgage payments, or both (Safawi, A., & Floyd, I., 2020). Of those reporting these hardships about 42 percent of these were Black households and 36 percent were Latino households (2020). This is in comparison to only 20 percent of White households. Changes must be made to prevent future hardships for the general population as studies have shown that “experiencing poverty and hardship, even briefly, has detrimental, life-long impacts on children. Researchers have linked stress caused by a scarcity of resources to have lasting negative consequences for children's brain development and physical health (2020).

Future Direction

Issues at hand

The TANF Block Grant was created to end welfare (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). Under TANF, the states are then provided block grants to utilize for different

services and needs for the families. With a background of how funds get distributed, there has been an increase and decrease of assistance given to families applying for TANF. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities shares that one of the lingering issues with TANF is that it has weakened the safety net of adequate income coming into the households of those individuals who live in poverty and are going through hardship (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). This has to do with the fact that there are States eligibility requirements. This then affects families that cannot fulfill those requirements. This eligibility has created a significant disparity in certain races/ethnicities for program access (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). With the funds given to the States, at times, that money does not go straight to TANF specifically. The funds are utilized on other services as well.

For example, with COVID. From 2020-2021 there was an increase in unemployment benefits due to many people losing their jobs. According to the Congressional Research Service, Congress had authorized expansion for unemployment, and it had left other programs such as TANF to receive less needed cash assistance. If there is no action taken in place in Congress to expand assistance to those receiving TANF, that goes back to the States because there are no extra funds given to them to give to families who are eligible for this assistance. With this in mind, in 2020, there was a decrease in families receiving TANF. It was reported that 1 million families received assistance, which was a 6.4% decrease from the previous year (Congressional Research Service, 2021).

Lastly, TANF has not reached enough families who are in poverty. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities shared information stating that for every 100 families only 18 families will receive cash assistance (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). The statistics in the

reading show that families who are receiving TANF have lessened throughout the last seven years. While Families in poverty have increased.

Looking Ahead

Tennessee, in particular, has spent about 30% of the federal and state funds on basic assistance (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). This is good compared to the other 14 states that spent less than 10% on assistance, such as Texas only spent 4% of the funds on basic assistance (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). COVID played a financial role in distributing some of these funds when the pandemic had just hit. Furthermore, in March 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 has been passed to include \$1 billion towards the Pandemic Emergency Assistance funds (Office of Family Assistance, 2021). With these funds, states will allow short-term assistance to eligible families and will run through September 2022 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021).

As previously discussed, although the federal government does control the money distributed to the states, the states can further improve programs and also reduce the disparity regarding race and poverty and also work towards removing barriers that give access to those individuals who are still having difficulty on accessing cash assistance through TANF (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021).

Presentation of the Brand and Support Mapping

Framework of the Brand

The campaign is called “TANF Surplus to Help Children in Poverty”. This title was chosen because it explains the campaign’s mission in a nutshell by showing what funds are going to be used as well as what the funds will be used for. The campaign is proposing to

repurpose the TANF surplus of over \$700 million dollars to help serve children in poverty more effectively (Gurak, 2021). This campaign truly believes that each and every child is important and should be provided for in the most effective way possible. By providing aid to families in poverty, we can ensure that the children of the future are cared for. The thought behind this title is that viewers would be able to know the topic and goal of the campaign by just looking at the title.

Support and Opposition Map

<u>Opponents</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Supporters</u>
Some taxpayers	Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS)	Tennessee Justice Center Tennessee Association of Community Action TANF Faith-Based and Community Organizations Initiative United Way of Greater Chattanooga Salvation Army

Persuasive Arguments

Objection 1: The more TANF funds used, the more tax individuals will have to pay to fund the program (Dorfman, 2014).

Argument 1: The TANF program in Tennessee has a surplus of funds of over \$700 million dollars that are not currently being used (Gurak, 2021). Therefore, increasing the basic assistance would not raise taxes for the people since the money would be pulled from this surplus.

Objection 2: The TANF program creates a dependency on the program. Individuals would rather receive welfare benefits than work and lose these benefits (Hudges, 2016).

Argument 2: Individuals cannot stay on TANF for more than 60 months or 5 years. Once they have reached that time limit, your benefits are reduced by 20% and continue to decrease each year (Berns, n.d.). With this time limit, individuals cannot become dependent on the program for life because they will not receive benefits for life. It was found that on average, families received TANF benefits from 1-12 months or from 37-48 months (Irving, 2015).

Objection 3: Welfare programs such as TANF are not actually helping to reduce the causes of poverty. Rather, TANF and other welfare programs are growing too rapidly and will cause the U.S. economy to go bankrupt helping individuals that are taking advantage of the system (Smith, 2010).

Argument 3: Changing how the TANF funds are spent will not cause the U.S. economy to go bankrupt because the campaign will be using the Tennessee TANF surplus of \$700 million (Gurak, 2021). This will allow individuals to be helped more effectively.

Objection 4: Welfare fraud is a large concern for many individuals. In 2020, \$1.5 billion was spent improperly within the TANF program (*Welfare Fraud*, n.d.).

Argument 4: While fraud is always a concern with any program, much work has been done to improve welfare fraud in recent years. In 2016 there were 8,048 cases of TANF fraud. However, in 2020 there were only 1,126 cases (Mrkonjic, 2021). While the numbers have improved significantly, work is consistently being done to lower these numbers even more.

Objection 5: TANF helps people who make poor decisions in life, such as drug and alcohol addiction, and therefore, do not deserve welfare assistance (Caplan, 2016).

Argument 5: Only a small percentage of TANF funds go towards direct cash assistance. The majority of the TANF funds in 2018 were spent on education for TANF children. More specifically, 62.1% of TANF funds were spent on pre-K and head start (*TANF and MOE*, 2019). The TANF program is intended to address children who are in poverty. Because of this, the eligibility criteria for TANF excludes families without children or women who are pregnant.

Notes on Opposition

Opposition to TANF includes the following reasons: some taxpayers worry about higher taxes, the opinion that people want to “live” off welfare, and/or that they don’t deserve it.

Plans to Form a Coalition

Logical Partners

There are several logical partners that the campaign will target, the first is the Tennessee Association of Community Action. This organization would be best suited to be a local partner because it advocates for the overall betterment of a family’s situation. The community action’s

role would be to help our organization with our proposed policy changes. This organization is familiar with writing policies and advocating for change in the community.

The second partner is United Way of Greater Chattanooga. We are confident this organization will support our policy changes because it is known for collaborating with various community partners to address community-specific challenges with an emphasis on education, health, and stability. Their main approach is to create an environment of opportunity, where every child born in the community has a chance at succeeding. Their role would be handling the creation of advertisements to get more support for our policy changes.

The third partner that was chosen is the Catholic Charities organization. Catholic Charities of East Tennessee are a coalition of service-centered community-driven programs. This will be helpful to our proposed changes because this organization advocates for helping vulnerable populations and offers services through shelter, counseling, education, and advocacy. The Catholic Charities organization is also open to working collaboratively with other community resources and organizations to serve those in need. Their role would be to help our organization mobilize supporters for our proposed changes. Our program could utilize members of Catholic Charities to find stakeholders that can help influence the minds of opposing senators and politicians.

Odd Bedfellows

The odd bedfellows chosen to help with our campaign are two republican lawmakers. The first bedfellow chosen is Republican Senator Bo Watson. Although he is not in favor of using the rainy-day fund that has accumulated on the surplus. Senator Watson, chairman of the Senate Finance, Ways & Means Committee, pointed out that the legislature gave permission to Lieutenant Governor Randy McNally to distribute the funds to families in need. We believe

Senator Watson could be a great asset to our cause because he might be able to convince Lt. Gov. McNally of the importance of releasing those funds to families.

The second odd bedfellow chosen is Republican Representative Patsy Hazelwood. Representative Hazelwood was one of the Tennessee Republicans who voted for the increase to TANF benefits in the state of Tennessee. She agreed that people who needed assistance were those who were trying. Due to her influence in the party and in Tennessee, she may be able to change the minds of other senators to vote for our proposed changes to the TANF policy.

Media Campaign

Campaign Goals

For the media campaign, the hope is to reach multiple audiences. These intended audiences include the general public, registered voters, legislators, and advocacy organizations. Each of these intended audiences has a specific purpose within our campaign and specific goals that we hope they can complete after hearing about our message and mission.

The first one is the general public. The hope is that after they hear our message, they will be inspired to draw attention to the issue by educating other individuals about the issue. Another audience that we will appeal to is registered voters in Tennessee. The goal is that these voters will contact elective officials via phone call or email and ask them to act and create legislation for this issue. In regards to legislators, the goal is that legislators such as Republican Representative Patsy Hazelwood and Republican Senator Bo Watson will push for TANF policy change by signing on to sponsor or cosponsor a bill that will make change happen within the TANF policy. Finally, the team will appeal to advocacy organizations in Tennessee such as the Tennessee Association of Community Action, United Way of Greater Chattanooga, and Catholic

Charities. These organizations have the ability to advocate and make others aware of the issue and the mission of our campaign. The larger the voice we have, the greater impact we can make for children and families in Tennessee.

Media Avenues

The group will be using multiple media outlets to reach the most people possible. We will use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to reach the younger population and possibly the most with the volume of people that use social media nowadays. We will also use TV, radio, and phone calls to reach those who may not have internet access or choose not to use social media.

Radio stations the group will use include NoogaRadio 92.7, which is a news/talk radio station, and WIVK 107.7, a country radio station in Knoxville, that has won numerous awards and has a large listening audience. In order to reach a larger number of people with our message we will reach out to the following television stations: WDEF in Chattanooga, WBIR in Knoxville, and WSMV in Nashville. We will also contact investigative reporters, Anita Wadhvani and Mike Reicher, who write for The Tennessean newspaper and have appeared on podcasts. Finally, we will contact Sam Stockard, a reporter who has written an article on Tennessee Lookout.com regarding the surplus of TANF funds not being used.

Media Content

The use of social media will be the main focus on which the campaign will be shared. Outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Twitter will be essential to spread the information regarding TANF cash assistance. Topics that will be shared on Twitter will be about information regarding the understanding of TANF and the support the community can give to participate in events going around Tennessee. Tweets will include links to more extensive and

more informative posts shared on the Facebook page. For there to be more media coverage, hashtags will play an essential factor in being able to get information on the trending pages:

#TANForAll #Increasecash4TANF #TANFinTN

Facebook will be a media outlet that will share statistics of how TANF cash assistance has decreased throughout Tennessee. It will also contain information on Policies in Tennessee that play in effect towards TANF. Weekly updates will be made from the team members and the progress of making a change for the families receiving TANF. The Facebook post will also provide information on how individuals in the community can contact legislators who are on the opposing side of the TANF surplus.

Additionally, the campaign will also have phone scripts (See Appendix B), especially for those individuals who have no access to social media but heard of the campaign on television and radio. A phone script will be provided to those who will be making the calls, and it will have information about the campaign, ways to participate (speaking to others in their community, attending events held by the group or the county), and also answer any questions that the individual may have regarding the campaign.

Implementation Steps

The following are the steps the group will take to implement the media campaign.

- 1) Starting on November 1, 2021, the group will create our educational materials. These will include the fact sheet and policy brief.
- 2) On November 8, 2021, we will start our media campaign by giving a phone script to members of our coalition so that they can start making phone calls.

- 3) On November 9, 2021, we will make our posts on the social media outlets Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (See Appendix E).
- 4) On November 10, 2021, we will send a letter to Senator Yarbrow, who in the past has questioned the reluctance to use the surplus TANF funds to help the public, to seek sponsorship for the amendment to the bill.
- 5) Also, our group will schedule a walk for November 17, 2021 to raise public awareness of our cause.

Advocacy Plan

Focus and Beneficiaries

The focus of the campaign is the Tennessee legislature. The intended beneficiaries of the campaign are children and families who are current TANF recipients in Tennessee as well as children and families that meet the eligibility criteria for Tennessee's TANF program and will become TANF recipients in the future.

Advocacy Strategies

The aim of an effective advocacy strategy is to create or change policies, laws, regulations, or any other decisions that affect the lives of people and to ensure such decisions lead to implementation. Most advocacy strategies for TANF depended heavily on observation and monitoring of implementation and effectiveness of the policy (Fremstad & Primus, 2002). Like much of social policy TANF has not formally gone through a full reauthorization since 2005. Rather it has been stumbled along with short-term extensions since 2010.

Advocacy Strategies useful for Poverty

Influencing public policy change can be difficult and complex, particularly for those with limited power and resources (Cullerton et al., 2018). The most important thing to remember is that it doesn't matter what is done to advocate for change, just as long as people take action to achieve these changes. Several advocacy strategies have been used to push for change for individuals who suffer from poverty. A change that has been used quite frequently is education. Education is one of the most important ways to advocate for change. In order to mobilize others to make a difference people must be educated on poverty and its effects on families. One way to educate people about poverty is to direct them to firsthand reports about the problems people in poverty face on a daily basis. Additionally, documentaries on poverty and even on TANF related issues can be helpful (Borgen Project, 2018)

Another powerful strategy used is contacting local representatives. Few people realize how great of an impact that a call or even writing a letter to an elected official can have. Contact with an elected official allows for that official to become familiar with the issue and get an idea of how important that issue is to our constituency. That knowledge will then translate into an actionable change regarding poverty (Borgen Project, 2018). The use of town halls, rallies and press conferences has been utilized as a strategy to bring public awareness about the issue of poverty and to hold policymakers accountable. This is a way to participate and ask elected officials questions on his/her positions on the policy (*How do I advocate for policy change?*, 2017).

Involvement of Beneficiaries

The group of TANF Surplus, to help families in poverty, will engage with their target population, including families who are receiving TANF in the state of Tennessee. The group

will begin by communicating with the legislators of the state to discuss further the issue of cash assistance that ties up with the advocacy plan of the group. Being able to provide the legislators with the policy brief and the fact sheet will give the legislators to see the statistics that have been researched with the population that falls under TANF. Reaching out to the public will also be a great way for others to learn about the plan, which would greatly support spreading information regarding the situation in which the advocacy plan is about.

Potential Ramifications

Giving testimony is one of the most effective ways to educate legislators and policymakers about the impact either positive or negative that proposed change might have. Legislators aren't always aware of all the implications that a piece of legislation may have on their constituents (Guidelines for Preparing, Writing, and Giving Testimony, n.d.)

Positive Ramifications

When families can share their testimony, they are able to use their voices to advocate and bring awareness to their own issues in relation to TANF and cash assistance. Hearing their experiences firsthand may cause legislators to feel empathetic and more inclined to produce change. The testimonies may also gather additional support from constituents who may see the benefits of implementing change to the cash assistance program.

Negative Ramifications

Testimonies of families can be met with resistance and push back from legislators who are not supportive of the changes to TANF's cash assistance program. Legislators are more likely to say changes are unnecessary or say insensitive comments that might cause distress.

This negative response may cause some family members to lose hope and give on seeking change or testifying in the future.

Potential Opposition

As with any campaign, some opposition can be expected as advocacy efforts progress. Some opposition that can be expected with this campaign includes individuals feeling that taxes will get increased if cash benefits are increased, that it will create more lenient boundaries which could allow families to become dependent on the program, and that it will allow individuals to continue and even pay for drug and alcohol addictions. Other points of opposition could include individuals concerned about how this increase in cash benefits will affect the economy and that this will open up more room for fraud in the welfare system.

When this opposition presents itself, we will respond by presenting facts to these individuals about the reality of the TANF program in Tennessee and how our campaign will or will not affect it. These facts could include the following. Currently in Tennessee there is a surplus of over \$700 million dollars (Gurak, 2021). Because of this, increasing cash benefits will not increase taxes nor would it cause the economy to go bankrupt as the funds to increase cash benefits would be pulled from the surplus of funds. In addition, individuals cannot stay on TANF for more than 60 months or 5 years (Berns, n.d.). With this time limit, individuals cannot become dependent on the program for life because they will not receive benefits for life. It was found that on average, families received TANF benefits from 1-12 months or from 37-48 months (Irving, 2015).

While fraud is always a concern with any program, much work has been done to improve welfare fraud in recent years. In 2016 there were 8,048 cases of TANF fraud. However, in 2020

there were only 1,126 cases (Mrkonjic, 2021). While the numbers have improved significantly, work is consistently being done to lower these numbers even more. Finally, only a small percentage of TANF funds go towards direct cash assistance. The majority of the TANF funds in 2018 were spent on education for TANF children. More specifically, 62.1% of TANF funds were spent on pre-K and head start (*TANF and MOE*, 2019). The TANF program is intended to address children who are in poverty. Because of this, the eligibility criteria for TANF excludes families without children or women who are pregnant. This does not allow for individuals to become dependent on the program nor does it allow for individuals to use the money for drug and/or alcohol addictions.

Elected Officials to Approach

Our advocacy coalition will contact Rep. William Lamberth (R-Portland), who was the sponsor of the original bill HB 0142, and his staff contact, Amelia Mitchell, who is one of his Senior Legislative Advisors, to schedule an appointment to meet with them at their office, to see if he will sponsor the amendment to the bill. We will also have members of our coalition make phone calls to the co-sponsors of the bill, to see if they will co-sponsor the amendment as well, including: Ron Gant, Bryan Terry, Robin Smith, Paul Sherrell, David Hawk, Harold M. Love Jr., Vincent Dixie, Barbara Cooper, G.A. Hardaway, Jerome Moon, Joe Towns Jr., John Crawford, Mark White, Antonio Parkinson, Debra Moody, Dale Carr, Eddie Mannis, Mary Littleton, Rebecca Alexander, Dwayne Thompson, Scott Cepicky, Susan Lynn, Rick Eldridge, Chris Hurt, Jason Hodges, Karen Camper, John Gillespie, Jesse Chism, Darren Jernigan, and Sam McKenzie.

Since HB 0142 was assigned to the House Finance, Ways, and Means Committee, it would be expected that the group's proposed amendment would be assigned to this committee as

well. Once the amendment is sponsored the group will send a copy of the fact sheet and policy brief (See Appendices F & G) to those members. We will also reach out with phone calls to those members including Scotty Campbell, John Crawford, Jeremy Faison, Bob Freeman, Johnny Garrett, Gary Hicks, London Lamar, Susan M. Lynn, Larry J. Miller, Brandon Ogles, Jerry Sexton, Johnny Shaw, Mike Sparks, Chris Todd, Sam Whitson, Ryan Williams, John Mark Windle, and Jason Zachary. NOTE: There are members of the committee not listed as they were also co-sponsors of the bill and have been listed previously and will be contacted as a co-sponsor.

On the Senate side, our coalition will reach out to Sen. Jack Johnson (R-Franklin), who was the sponsor of SB 0751, the companion bill for HB 0142, and his staff contact, Luke Gustafson, who is his Senior Legislative Advisor, to schedule a meeting with them at their office. We will also have members of our coalition make phone calls to the co-sponsors of the bill including: Bo Watson, Becky Duncan Massey, Dawn White, Raumesh Akbari, Rusty Crowe, Heidi Campbell, John Stevens, Page Walley, Jeff Yarbrow, Richard Briggs, Brenda Gilmore, and Ed Jackson.

As with HB 0142, SB 0751 was assigned to the Senate Finance, Ways, and Means Committee and we will send a copy of the fact sheet and policy brief to these members and their aides. We will also reach out to them by making phone calls to those members including: Todd Gardenhire, Ferrell Haile, Jack Johnson, Jon Lundberg, and Ken Yager. NOTE: There are members of the committee not listed as they were also co-sponsors of the bill and have been listed previously and will be contacted as a co-sponsor.

The coalition plans to also reach out to majority party leaders, Speaker of the House, Rep. Cameron Sexton (R-Crossville) and Rep. Karen D. Camper (D-Memphis) and their aides to

schedule a meeting at their offices. The coalition will also schedule an appointment with Lt. Governor Randy McNally (R-Oak Ridge), who is the Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the Senate. We will try to schedule all the appointments for the week of January 18 – 21, 2022, as the assembly reconvenes on January 11, 2022. Before the scheduled appointments we will send a copy of our fact sheet and policy brief to everyone's office.

Main Talking Points

One of the first points that will be brought up will be how Tennessee is one of the states with the lowest cash assistance provided to families receiving TANF. However, lawmakers in Tennessee do control the funds distributed to the families, which will lead to the second point, which will state how families in Tennessee who receive monthly assistance of \$245 do not have enough funds to support their household financially. Families in Tennessee will benefit from an increase in assistance, especially if there are funds that have totaled up to \$740 million (The Tennessean, 2021).

Additionally, having personal stories from families under TANF and having seen the difficulty of receiving such a small amount has been affecting their families. Next, the group will explain what changes can be made, which will start with advocating to change the existing section under House bill 142, which states how a surplus of \$677 cannot be surpassed by cash assistance for families. Furthermore, implementing this change in the bill would be of great support to all the households under TANF. Receiving an increase of cash assistance will work towards these families to work towards self-sufficiency.

Plan to Monitor Progress

The coalition will monitor the progress of the proposed amendment on the website <https://capitol.tn.gov>. A member of the coalition will check this website a minimum of three times a week. We will also contact Deanna Story and/or Amelia Mitchell, staff contacts for Rep. William Lamberth, Myles Buell, staff contact for the House Finance, Ways, and Means Committee, Luke Gustafson, staff contact for Sen. Jack Johnson, and Laynee Phillips, staff contact for the Senate Finance, Ways, and Means Committee. Our goal will be to have contact with the staff members at least once a week. The coalition will also monitor implementation by following the progress on the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS), which is the agency responsible for administering and supervising TANF benefits in the state of Tennessee.

Conclusion

TANF Surplus to Help Children in the State of Tennessee is a campaign that was put together to advocate for and create change within the TANF program in the state of Tennessee. The goal is to reallocate the TANF surplus funds of over 700 million dollars. These funds will be used to increase the cash assistance for families in the state of Tennessee who are current or future recipients of TANF. For instance, for a family of one, cash assistance will be increased from \$184 a month to \$375 a month. This will be accomplished by educating the general public and registered voters in Tennessee about the campaign and encouraging them to educate others and call or email elected officials drawing attention to this issue. In addition, legislators will be asked to support the campaign and create legislation for this issue. Lastly, advocacy organizations will be asked to join the campaign and create awareness regarding the issue. This campaign truly believes that each and every child is important. By providing aid to families in poverty, the campaign can ensure that children of the future are cared for.

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Appendix A

Positional Map - Legislators

[Note - See PowerPoint Attached Separately]

Appendix B

Sample Phone Script for Tennessee Voters

Hello, my name is [Name], I live in Tennessee and I am calling to ask [State Official] to support the TANF Surplus to Help Children in the state of Tennessee. This campaign is advocating for change to the TANF program in Tennessee to allow for reallocation of the 700 million dollars unused surplus that Tennessee currently has. These surplus funds will be used to increase the cash benefits that TANF recipients currently receive which will enable Tennessee to serve children and families in poverty more effectively. Please consider advocating for these changes to the TANF program in Tennessee. Thank you for your time.

Appendix C

Sample Email Script for Tennessee Voters

Greetings,

My name is [Name], and I am a current resident of Tennessee. I am writing this email regarding a campaign that I feel needs attention and support. I am asking [State Official] to support the campaign entitled “TANF Surplus to Help Children in the state of Tennessee”. This campaign is advocating for change to the TANF program in Tennessee to allow for reallocation of the 700 million dollars unused surplus that Tennessee currently has. These surplus funds will be used to increase the cash benefits that TANF recipients currently receive which will enable Tennessee to serve children and families in poverty more effectively.

Please consider advocating for these changes to the TANF program in Tennessee. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely, [Name]

Appendix D

Sample Email Script for Tennessee Organizations

Subject line: Invitation of Support and Partnership

Dear Tina,

We are inviting your organization to be one of our partners in advocating for needy families in Tennessee. Our team is trying to increase cash assistance by proposing funds be reallocated from the accumulated surplus here in Tennessee. This cause is very important to us because we believe that every family deserves the right to access basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing.

Our team is encouraged by the support already received, but still need help furthering our cause to local senators and legislators.

The advocacy team would appreciate working with such a dynamic organization such as yours.

If you are interested in the role and our cause, please schedule a meeting via the link below.

[Meetingink.lpq](#)

Looking forward to your response and possible meeting. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like to know more about our advocacy team. Thanks for your time.

Sincerely,

Danica Antoine

Co-Director of Increase Surplus Advocacy Team

Appendix E

Social Media Post

“Tennessee families, do you know that your voice counts? Join the TANF Surplus to Help Children in the State of Tennessee and see what we are advocating to better your family’s needs when it comes to financial assistance”



“The TANF Surplus to Help Children in the State of Tennessee is here for you, join and learn about the campaign that is regarding House Bill 142 and the changes that the group would want to implement. See our website for more information www.TSCP.org”

“Are you receiving TANF? Has your cash assistance decreased? Share your story and have your voice be heard by using the hashtags #TANForAll #Increasecash4TANF #TANFinTN”.

Let your voice be heard.



Appendix F

Fact Sheet

[Note - See Separate Attachment]

Appendix G

Policy Brief

Policy Brief: Reallocation Surplus for Needy Children in the Tennessee

Problem Statement

- In Tennessee, there is currently a surplus in place to help needy families. The surplus has thus far increased to over 700 million dollars, more than enough to help the families who need it.¹
- There are currently 22% of children living in poverty. The range between the wealthiest and poorest counties is significant with a low 5.2% in Williamson County to a high of nearly half 49.1% in Lake County. Racial and ethnic differences also contribute to integrational cycles of poverty that can be hard to break. White children are least likely to be in poverty in every category. Hispanic children are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, while black children are most likely to live in extreme poverty.²
- About 15 percent of children live in areas of concentrated poverty, which is associated with high crime rates and low social mobility. Research shows that growth in concentrated poverty is highest in medium-sized metropolitan and suburban areas, while the urban base of concentrated poverty remains high.²
- Deepening poverty is directly linked to homelessness and food insecurity/hunger for many Americans and children are particularly affected by these conditions.³ The increase in surplus would be able to help curb some of these issues faced and allow for families to gain proper access to needed resources.

Current Policy Situation and Gaps

- The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, enacted in 1996, replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which provided cash assistance to families with children experiencing poverty.
- Cash assistance received, averages around \$387 dollars per family. These allocation amounts are very low, and families can benefit more from the accumulated surplus. The low cash assistance is not able to meet basic needs such as housing. Most TANF don't receive housing subsidies and TANF benefits alone don't cover average housing cost. The monthly benefits for a family of three is now below the average cost of a modest 2-bedroom apartment.⁴

- TANF caseloads fell in the late 1990s due to the 4% fall of unemployment. States then shifted funds for other purposes. When the economy slowed and cash assistance was needed by families, states were unable to reclaim those funds to help the growing number of families that needed it. States responded by cutting TANF benefits and tightening eligibility rules by shortening and tightening limits.⁵

Policy Recommendations

Our recommendations are to reallocate funds to families from the TANF surplus that has accumulated more than 700 million dollars.⁶ For instance, a family of one receives around \$184 a month, that amount can be increased to \$475 using the TANF surplus. The reallocation of funds will be a step to help families meet basic needs like housing and decrease food security. The increase in funds will not cause taxpayers to pay any additional funds because the increase will be coming directly from the surplus.

Policy Brief

The increase in funds during early childhood can significantly improve a child's future. The lack of increasing funds prevents needy families from addressing basic needs which eventually impacts children. The limited access to funding also put these families on a downward spiral making it even harder for them to get back on their feet.⁷

Conclusions

Cash assistance TANF benefits are inadequate to address child poverty in Tennessee. We recommend the increase in cash assistance to the cash assistance program to better support needy families. The increase would

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