

**TANF for Tomorrow: A Policy and Advocacy Action Plan**

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## Abstract

Poverty is a pressing issue in Tennessee, with extreme poverty rates reaching 8% in 2024, highlighting the need for effective policy solutions. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, Families First in Tennessee, provides crucial financial aid and work-related services to low-income families. However, the program faces significant challenges, including the lowest benefit levels in the nation and an unspent surplus of \$717 million, reflecting inefficiencies in resource allocation. These barriers disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, such as rural and minority families, limiting access to essential support. This policy plan advocates for reintroducing and passing Tennessee Senate Bill 1961/House Bill 2397. The proposed legislation would increase TANF base payments and index them to inflation, beginning January 1, 2025, ensuring that benefits keep pace with the rising cost of living. Addressing the inadequacy of current benefit levels, the policy would provide meaningful financial relief to TANF-eligible families, improving their ability to meet basic needs such as housing, food, and healthcare. Additionally, increased TANF spending would bolster local economies, as funds are often spent on community necessities. Support for the policy comes from advocates for low-income families, social service organizations, and legislators prioritizing equitable financial assistance. However, fiscal conservatives' opposition to long-term budget impacts poses a challenge. Potential unintended consequences, such as administrative delays in adjusting benefits and eligibility barriers, must be carefully mitigated to ensure successful implementation. Advocacy efforts are critical to reintroducing and advancing this legislation in the next legislative session, underscoring its importance in reducing poverty and fostering economic stability for Tennessee's most vulnerable families.

## Topic of Focus

### Introduction to the Social Policy

The chosen social problem is that of poverty in the state of Tennessee. Poverty is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau using income thresholds that depend on family size and composition. In 2022, a family of four earning less than \$29,678 or an individual earning below \$14,880 is considered to be living in poverty. These thresholds are not merely statistical markers but critical in determining eligibility for federal and state assistance programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF is designed to provide financial aid to needy families and encourage self-sufficiency through work-related initiatives. In Tennessee, the poverty situation is more acute, with an 8% extreme poverty rate as of 2024. Extreme poverty refers to individuals or families whose income falls significantly below the federal poverty threshold, typically less than half of the designated amount. This statistic highlights the deeper socio-economic struggles within the state, where not only are a significant number of people living below the poverty line, but a large subset is living in extreme poverty, meaning they have less than half the income needed to meet basic needs. (Pathways to Resilience, Tennessee, 2024).

### *The purpose of Families First, Tennessee's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)*

Families First, Tennessee's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, provides financial aid and work-related services to low-income families with the goal of promoting self-sufficiency. It offers temporary cash assistance and supports job training to help parents secure and maintain employment. The program aims to care for children within their homes, reduce dependency on public assistance through work, prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and encourage two-parent family structures. Families First requires participants to engage in work or educational activities to help break the cycle of poverty and reduce long-term reliance on government assistance. The Families First program addresses poverty by providing essential services to low-income families. However, despite its wide range of services, challenges persist in reaching all eligible families and ensuring that resources are distributed

equitably. According to the Tennessee Department of Human Services (2023-a), many families struggle to access TANF benefits due to administrative hurdles, lack of awareness, and difficulty navigating the system. These gaps in service delivery leave many vulnerable groups, such as rural families and minorities, without the support they need to achieve economic stability.

### ***The Policy Issue***

Tennessee's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program faces a critical issue of unspent surplus funds, which limits its effectiveness in alleviating poverty. The state receives approximately \$190 million annually from the federal TANF program, but Tennessee has accumulated a significant surplus without a specific deadline for spending the funds. As of early 2024, the surplus stands at \$717 million, even though about 29,000 Tennesseans, including over 23,000 children, rely on TANF. Tennessee provides an average cash stipend of just \$387 per month for a family of three, the lowest in the nation. This low benefit level, combined with the state's large surplus of unspent funds, presents a significant challenge in addressing poverty (Kelman, 2024; Wadhwani, 2024).

In addition to cash assistance, Tennessee allocates TANF funds to community organizations offering childcare, transportation, and job training services. However, a report by Whitt (2020) highlighted that the state had not fully utilized its TANF allotment for over a decade, leading to a surplus that was the largest in the nation then. Although Tennessee passed the TANF Opportunity Act in 2021, which capped the surplus at \$190 million and allocated funds to poverty-reduction initiatives, the state continues to experience delays in distributing these resources. Public pressure has increased for the state to provide faster, more direct financial support to families in need, as Tennessee still holds one of the largest TANF surpluses in the country (Wadhwani, 2024).

### ***Proposed Solution***

The proposed solution is reintroducing and passing Tennessee Senate Bill 1961/House Bill 2397. This legislation seeks to increase the base payment for TANF-eligible families by adjusting the payments annually to reflect inflation, beginning January 1, 2025. The adjustment would be based on the percentage change in inflation over the previous two calendar years. By aligning TANF benefits with inflation, the program would provide immediate financial relief to low-income families, helping them better meet essential needs such as housing, food, and healthcare. This would allow the state to utilize its TANF funds better and improve the financial stability of thousands of needy families. This change would enhance the program's effectiveness and ensure it fulfills its goal of supporting Tennessee's most vulnerable families in a more direct and impactful way (TrackBill, n.d.).

### ***Goals of the Policy***

The primary goal of Senate Bill 1961/House Bill 2397 is to increase financial support for low-income families in Tennessee by adjusting Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits to account for inflation. By aligning these payments with the rising cost of living, the policy aims to enhance the economic stability of families who rely on TANF, ensuring they can better meet essential needs such as food, housing, and healthcare (TrackBill, n.d.).

### ***Primary Issue Addressed***

This policy addresses the insufficient benefit levels provided by Tennessee's TANF program, which are among the lowest in the nation. Despite a significant surplus of unspent TANF funds, Tennessee's current cash stipend does not adequately support families. The bill seeks to ensure that available funds are effectively used to provide meaningful financial relief to low-income families (Wadhvani, 2024).

### ***Provisions and Rules***

Tennessee Senate Bill 1961 (House Bill 2397) mandates that the base TANF payments be adjusted annually based on the inflation rate over the previous two calendar years, starting January 1, 2025. This provision aims to make TANF benefits responsive to economic conditions, offering low-income families timely financial support that better reflects current costs (TrackBill, n.d.).

### ***Impact of the Policy***

Primary beneficiaries are low-income TANF-eligible families in Tennessee, including approximately 29,000 Tennesseans, of whom over 23,000 are children. These families would receive more substantial and consistent financial support (Kelman, 2024). The Tennessee Department of Human Services and other state agencies must adjust TANF payment levels annually, requiring added administrative efforts. Frontline workers like social workers and case managers may also have to manage new procedures, outreach, and eligibility adjustments to ensure smooth implementation (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2023-b).

### ***Potential Unintended Consequences***

One potential unintended consequence is administrative delays. The policy may introduce temporary delays in adjusting payments annually, which could cause some families to face short-term financial strain before new benefits take effect. Another potential consequence of this change may impact eligibility barriers. Increased scrutiny in eligibility determinations may inadvertently exclude eligible families due to bureaucratic hurdles, especially in rural or underserved communities where access to administrative support may be limited (Wadhwani, 2024).

### ***Support and Opposition***

Support for the bill mainly comes from advocates for low-income families, social service organizations, and certain legislators who prioritize enhanced support for families struggling to meet the rising cost of living. These supporters view the bill as necessary for more equitable financial assistance

(Pathways to Resilience, Tennessee, 2024). Opposition may arise from fiscal conservatives and others concerned about the financial implications of increasing public assistance spending. They may argue that indexing TANF payments to inflation could lead to higher state expenditures in the long term, potentially impacting other state budget areas (Kelman, 2024).

## **Policy Context**

This policy plan advocates for the revival of Tennessee Senate Bill 1961 (House Bill 2397) in its entirety as is. This legislation would ensure that TANF-eligible families receive monthly cash benefits that keep pace with rising costs and reflect the effects of inflation. The base monthly payment amount for TANF-eligible families would increase annually based on changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The increase would reflect the percentage change in the CPI for all items, averaged across cities, between the two most recent calendar years. If the CPI decreases in a given year, the payment amount will remain unchanged and not be reduced.

This bill was first introduced on January 24, 2024. It was last assigned to the General Subcommittee of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee on March 19, 2024, but stalled before the legislative session ended. Its lack of advancement suggests limited support from the committee chair. Advocacy is critical to ensure the bill is reintroduced and gains traction in the next legislative session. As of the conclusion of the 2024 legislative cycle, there have been no further initiatives to advocate for an increase in TANF benefits.

## **Importance**

### ***Poverty in Tennessee***

The poverty in Tennessee is currently at an all-time high for the past one to three years. In 2021, black and Hispanic households made significantly less than their white counterparts; black people in Tennessee made 42K, which was 2,000 less than the average salary for a black household in the United

States; and then Hispanic people made 56K, again being 2,000 lesser in the United States. The average ideal salary to live comfortably in Tennessee is around 86,403 dollars. This would mean that black and Hispanic households are well below the ideal salary, unlike their white counterparts, which is around 70K in comparison. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2023, Tennessee's overall poverty rate is around 13.6%, above the national average of 11.4%. However, certain rural counties experienced rates as high as 35%, which required targeted assistance through improved fund allocation. The way this issue can be solved is for job recruiters to stop discriminating against black and Hispanic parents trying to get a job and for the government to help families below the poverty line.

### *Negative Consequences*

In Tennessee, home to 6,910,840 residents, 14% of the population lives in poverty, with 8% experiencing extreme poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). On average, approximately one in six children in the state live in families with incomes below the federal poverty line (American Psychological Association [APA], 2024). Poverty has long-lasting consequences, particularly for children. It can contribute to inadequate nutrition, developmental delays, poor academic performance, behavioral challenges, and increased risks of health issues such as asthma and pneumonia (APA, 2024).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Huttman Policy Analysis Model serves as a rational framework to guide the campaign for Tennessee Senate Bill 1961/House Bill 2397, proposing an annual adjustment of TANF benefits based on inflation. This framework is particularly suited for policy campaigns that rely on systematic analysis and data-driven decision-making, as it prioritizes measurable goals, clear problem definitions, and evaluation strategies (O'Connor & Netting, 2011). Applying Huttman's model to the campaign provides a structured approach for addressing Tennessee's substantial TANF fund surplus while ensuring that low-income families receive benefits reflective of the actual cost of living.

At the outset, Huttman's model requires a precise definition of the social issue. Tennessee's current TANF payments are the lowest in the nation, offering only \$387 per month for a family of three, despite the state's TANF surplus exceeding \$717 million. This inadequate support has forced many low-income families into extreme poverty, unable to meet essential needs. The campaign for SB 1961/HB 2397 thus defines the core problem as Tennessee's underutilization of TANF resources, with current allocations failing to keep up with inflation, leaving recipients with diminishing purchasing power (TrackBill, n.d.).

Establishing measurable goals is central to Huttman's rational framework. This campaign's primary objective is to provide consistent financial support to low-income families through an inflation-based adjustment to TANF payments. Changes in poverty rates will measure this goal, increases in TANF fund utilization, and improvements in family self-sufficiency indicators. By indexing TANF benefits to inflation, the campaign aims to protect the purchasing power of benefits, preventing families from falling further into poverty as the cost of living rises (O'Connor & Netting, 2011).

A key component of Huttman's model is the examination of policy alternatives. This step involves weighing different approaches to identify the most effective and feasible solution. In this case, the campaign considers alternatives such as maintaining current payment levels or implementing a gradual, non-indexed increase. However, indexing TANF payments to inflation is found to be the most efficient and impactful option, as it offers automatic annual adjustments that align benefits with real-time economic conditions. States like California and New York have already implemented similar measures, successfully sustaining the purchasing power of TANF benefits for low-income families.

Huttman's model also emphasizes the need for a clear implementation and evaluation plan to ensure the proposed policy's success. The campaign for SB 1961/HB 2397 includes a strategy to build legislative support through partnerships with community organizations, policymakers, and advocacy groups. Effective implementation requires clear legislative language and a public awareness campaign to

communicate the benefits of the bill. Evaluation metrics will focus on poverty reduction, increased utilization of TANF funds, and feedback from TANF recipients on improved access to essential resources. Monitoring these data points annually will provide insights into the policy's success and highlight areas where further adjustments may be needed.

Overall, Huttman's rational framework offers a structured and logical approach to advocating for SB 1961/HB 2397. It ensures that the policy campaign is grounded in data and focuses on tangible, measurable outcomes. By applying this framework, the campaign effectively addresses the challenges of Tennessee's TANF surplus, substantiates the need for inflation-indexed payments, and supports low-income families in achieving financial stability.

## **Researching the Issue and Literature Review**

### **Nature of the Current Policy and Contextual Factors**

#### ***Historical Movements and Key Events of TANF***

The development of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in the United States has been influenced by several factors. It can be traced back to the 1935 creation of Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Between 1929 and 1933, the Great Depression created conditions of widespread unemployment, mass poverty, and the collapse of state-supported programs like mothers' pensions, leaving millions of children malnourished and without access to adequate housing, healthcare, or education (Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, n.d.-a). Many families were forced to rely on child labor for income, exposing children to hazardous work environments (Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, n.d.-a). These challenges emphasized the urgent need for federal intervention, leading to the creation of ADC under the Social Security Act of 1935 to provide targeted support to children in single-parent households.

During this time, President Franklin D. Roosevelt majorly influenced efforts to provide financial assistance to families in need during the Great Depression (Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, n.d.-b). Key individuals and movements that influenced Roosevelt in creating the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program included labor reformers, social workers, and progressive groups advocating for federal assistance to the poor (Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, n.d.-b). Frances Perkins, his Secretary of Labor, greatly influenced social welfare programs like ADC to address child welfare and unemployment by advocating for the protection of child welfare and the unemployed through federal policies (Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, n.d.-b). Additionally, the Progressive Movement influenced Roosevelt's belief in a federal safety net for vulnerable populations due to the advocacy efforts of progressive reformers, paving the way for ADC and future welfare programs (Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, n.d.-b). Later, it changed to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1962 under the Kennedy administration. The program expanded to support family members, including parents and those deemed "essential" to the child. Despite criticism of promoting dependence on government aid, this shift reflected the ever-changing dynamic of families during that time, consisting of an increase in single-parent households (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997).

AFDC remained in place until 1996, when welfare reform ended with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), replacing AFDC with TANF. This transition reflected the political climate of the 1990s, where there was growing bipartisan support for reducing government dependency and promoting work as a solution to poverty. During this time, there was a widespread belief that those on welfare programs were not contributing to society, particularly in terms of economic productivity or adherence to societal norms of self-reliance, and the stigma about AFDC grew into demands for reformation (Gu, 2016; Sawhill & Haskins, 2002). These beliefs were largely held by middle-class voters, policymakers, and media commentators who viewed welfare recipients as failing to align with societal norms of self-sufficiency and productivity. This perception was rooted in a "disjoint model of agency," which associates individual success or failure with personal

initiative rather than structural barriers (Gu, 2016). Recipients of welfare were often portrayed in the media as "lazy" or "lacking initiative," perpetuating stereotypes that they were unwilling to work or contribute to the economy (Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, n.d.-b). Additionally, many political leaders pushed for welfare reform due to these beliefs. Among some of the most influential were President Bill Clinton, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, John Kasich, Chairman of the House Budget Committee, and Bill Archer, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee (Haskins, 2006). Together, they spearheaded efforts to reshape the welfare system, emphasizing work requirements and reducing government dependency. As a result of these efforts, AFDC changed into The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996.

Under President Bill Clinton's administration, PRWORA emphasized personal responsibility, job preparation, and marriage as key components of TANF while also devolving greater control to states through block grants, which has since led to significant state-level variations in TANF implementation. National trends have shown a decline in TANF cash assistance caseloads, with receipt rates dropping from 79% of eligible individuals in 1994 under AFDC to 26% under TANF by 2018 (Falk, 2023). The shift from a needs-based system to one emphasizing work and self-sufficiency has significantly influenced public perception and policy on poverty in the U.S., particularly amid broader discussions about welfare stigma and government dependency (Spencer et al., 2022). The stigma that led people to believe that those on welfare were not contributing to society has shifted to the notion that individuals who work and strive to lift themselves out of poverty can receive assistance. Policy changes required recipients to seek employment or participate in job training programs to qualify for assistance, while time limits on benefits encouraged quicker transitions off welfare—a shift still reflected today (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2024).

In Tennessee, similar political and social forces have shaped the development of TANF policies, though with distinct local outcomes. After transitioning from AFDC to the Families First program under TANF in 1996, Tennessee saw a rapid decline in its TANF caseload, dropping by 34% in the first year

alone (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2002). Despite this, the state has faced persistent challenges, including low benefit levels and work participation rates. Tennessee's TANF benefit levels, which did not significantly adjust for inflation between 1996 and 2010, have remained insufficient to meet the rising cost of living. Although benefits have increased to \$387/month in 2023, they only account for 18.7% of the federal poverty level (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2023). Furthermore, Tennessee's stockpile of over \$700 million in unspent TANF funds has drawn criticism from advocates, who argue that the funds could be better utilized to support low-income families struggling with poverty and food insecurity (Kelman, 2024). These factors accentuate the ongoing tension in Tennessee between promoting work participation and addressing the persistent poverty many families face, with calls for greater transparency and reevaluating how TANF funds are allocated.

### *Previous Attempts in Tennessee*

In 2021, Tennessee passed the TANF Opportunity Act to cap the TANF surplus at \$190 million and allocate funds to poverty-reduction initiatives (Wadhvani, 2024). However, despite this legislative effort, many of the intended benefits did not reach needy families due to administrative delays and bureaucratic hurdles. Critics argued that the cap was insufficient, given the high levels of poverty in the state, and the continued accumulation of surplus funds demonstrated the program's inefficacy (Kelman, 2024). Supporters contended that the act represented a positive step toward addressing poverty but acknowledged that further measures, like SB 1961/HB 2397, were necessary for more meaningful change (Wadhvani, 2024).

### *Arguments For and Against Implementation*

**Supporters' Arguments.** Supporters of SB 1961/HB 2397 argue that adjusting TANF payments for inflation is crucial for the economic stability of low-income families. They emphasize that the current benefit levels do not meet families' basic needs and that the existing surplus should be used to support vulnerable populations effectively (TrackBill, n.d.). Advocates for low-income families, social service

organizations, and some lawmakers back this bill, highlighting the need for more robust financial support amid rising living costs (Wadhvani, 2024).

**Opposition Arguments.** Opponents, often fiscal conservatives, argue that increasing TANF payments could lead to higher government spending and create a dependency on welfare programs (Kelman, 2024). They express concerns that long-term financial implications may strain the state budget. There are also worries about the potential for misuse of funds or inefficiencies in the program, suggesting that resources could be better utilized through alternative strategies, such as job training or education programs rather than direct cash assistance (Kelman, 2024).

### ***Examples From Other States***

Other states have taken various approaches to address similar issues. For example:

**California.** California has implemented California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), which offers cash assistance adjusted annually for inflation. This program has successfully increased benefits to match the cost of living, improving the economic stability of participating families (California Department of Social Services, 2023).

**New York.** New York's Temporary Assistance Program has also seen similar adjustments, with benefits that are indexed to inflation. This adjustment has helped families keep pace with rising costs, addressing the inadequacy that often characterizes TANF programs (Williams & Thompson, 2021).

**Texas.** In contrast, Texas has faced criticism for its low TANF benefit levels and has struggled to pass legislation that adequately addresses inflation and rising living costs, resulting in ongoing challenges for low-income families (Texas Health and Human Services, n.d.).

In summary, while previous attempts in Tennessee have laid some groundwork, there remains a significant need for legislative action to ensure TANF benefits meet the needs of families. The success of initiatives in other states offers valuable insights into potential solutions for Tennessee's TANF program.

### **Policy Impact**

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, particularly in Tennessee, has had significant implications for low-income families and specific subgroups within that population. While the policy aims to provide temporary financial assistance and promote self-sufficiency, its effects vary considerably among different demographics.

### ***Overall Impact***

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program serves approximately 29,000 Tennesseans, including over 23,000 children, by providing cash assistance and support services (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2023-c). However, the average monthly cash stipend of \$387 for a family of three is the lowest in the nation, which limits the program's effectiveness in alleviating poverty (Kelman, 2024). The program's primary goal is to reduce dependency on government assistance through work-related initiatives. Nonetheless, many families struggle to meet essential needs such as housing, food, and healthcare due to low benefit levels, hindering overall economic stability (TrackBill, n.d.).

### ***Differential Impact on Subgroups***

Rural families often face greater challenges accessing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits due to limited transportation options and fewer local resources (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2023-c). Geographic disparities in service delivery can lead to significant barriers to obtaining assistance and resources, exacerbating economic hardships for these populations. Additionally, minority families, particularly African American and Hispanic communities, are disproportionately

affected by poverty in Tennessee. They face higher unemployment rates and lower access to educational and job training opportunities. The TANF program's bureaucratic hurdles can further alienate these groups, making it more difficult for them to navigate the application process (Wadhvani, 2024). Single-parent families, especially single mothers, represent a significant demographic of TANF beneficiaries. They rely more on TANF for financial support due to lower average incomes and increased childcare responsibilities (Kelman, 2024). The low benefit levels and insufficient support services can lead to increased financial strain, impacting the well-being of both parents and children. Furthermore, families with disabled members face unique challenges in accessing TANF benefits, as existing policies may not adequately address the additional financial burdens associated with disability-related expenses. Additionally, families with disabilities often encounter barriers to employment opportunities, further deepening their reliance on TANF and similar programs (TrackBill, n.d.).

### ***Varying Implementations and Their Effects***

The implementation of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) policies has varied across counties and regions in Tennessee, leading to differential impacts. In some areas, local agencies have successfully partnered with community organizations to provide comprehensive support services, including childcare and job training. In contrast, other regions may lack such partnerships, limiting the effectiveness of TANF benefits for families in those areas. Additionally, variability in administrative practices can impact families' access to TANF benefits. For instance, complex application processes and inadequate staff training in certain counties can create barriers, leading to lower participation rates among eligible families (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2023-c). Efforts to inform families about TANF benefits also differ across the state;. At the same time, some regions implement robust outreach programs, while others fall short, leaving many families unaware of their eligibility or the services available (Wadhvani, 2024).

In summary, while the TANF program has the potential to support low-income families in Tennessee, its impact is significantly shaped by the varying needs and circumstances of subpopulations. Addressing the disparities in access and benefits is crucial for improving the program's overall effectiveness and ensuring that it meets the needs of the most vulnerable families in the state.

## **Presentation of the Brand and Support Mapping**

### **The Brand**

The campaign's branding, “Empower Families: Bridging the TANF Gap in Tennessee,” is designed to evoke feelings of hope, support, and action. The title encapsulates the campaign's dual focus: empowerment and bridging the existing gaps within the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Tennessee.

The campaign seeks to evoke several key ideas and emotions. *Empowerment* signifies the campaign's commitment to uplifting families. It emphasizes providing financial assistance and the tools, resources, and support systems necessary for families to achieve self-sufficiency (Green, 2021). Using this term, the campaign aims to inspire confidence among recipients and stakeholders that meaningful change is possible (Smith & Lee, 2020).

The word *bridging* symbolizes the campaign's mission to connect families with the resources they need to thrive. It suggests a proactive approach to addressing the disparities in TANF support, highlighting the importance of closing the gap between available resources and the families who require assistance (Taylor, 2022). This term also evokes collaboration and community involvement, indicating that the campaign seeks to unite various stakeholders in the effort to reform TANF (Jones & White, 2019).

Referring to the *TANF Gap* focuses on the specific issue at hand—the insufficiency of benefits, the accumulation of unspent funds, and the barriers families face in accessing assistance (Brown, 2020).

This phrase frames the issue as one that is not only urgent but also solvable, encouraging action from policymakers, advocates, and the community to work together to address these gaps (Green, 2021).

The campaign's branding strategically frames the issue of TANF in a way that emphasizes both the challenges and the potential for positive change. By highlighting empowerment and the need to bridge gaps, the campaign shifts the narrative from victimhood to agency and collective responsibility (Smith & Lee, 2020).

In terms of framing, the campaign uses *positive framing* to position families as active participants in their own journeys toward financial stability. This empowers families to see themselves as individuals needing help and vital contributors to their communities (Taylor, 2022).

The title also serves as a call to action for supporters of TANF reform, inviting them to join in the movement to address poverty and improve the lives of vulnerable families in Tennessee. It fosters a sense of urgency while simultaneously promoting hope and collaboration among advocates, policymakers, and community members (Jones & White, 2019).

In summary, the branding “Empower Families: Bridging the TANF Gap in Tennessee” is designed to evoke a sense of agency, community, and urgency, framing the issue in a way that inspires action and fosters collaboration toward a more effective TANF program in Tennessee

### **Opinions Across the State**

The positional map (see Appendix A) shows various organizations and their stances on increasing TANF benefits, ranging from strong opposition to strong proponents. The organizations are categorized based on their level of support or opposition, with groups like the “Americans for Prosperity Tennessee Chapter” strongly opposing and “Catholic Charities of East Tennessee” strongly supporting.

### **Persuasive Arguments for Support**

To effectively advocate for TANF reform in Tennessee, it is essential to present compelling arguments that resonate with many potential supporters. Below are five key arguments highlighting the economic, social, and moral benefits of expanding TANF.

### ***Economic Benefits of Supporting Families***

Investing in low-income families through TANF can stimulate the local economy. When families receive adequate support, they spend more on essential goods and services, which helps local businesses thrive. This argument frames TANF as a social issue and an economic strategy that benefits the broader community. Research indicates that families with access to increased financial assistance tend to spend more on goods and services, which boosts local economies (Smith & Johnson, 2021). This economic boost extends beyond individual families, benefiting entire communities and creating a positive feedback loop of local spending and business growth. By demonstrating that investing in families can lead to increased economic activity, potential supporters may see TANF reform as a sound financial decision, making aligning with the advocacy plan easier.

### ***Reduction of Long-Term Costs***

Supporting families in poverty can reduce long-term costs associated with social services, healthcare, and the criminal justice system. Families with sufficient resources are less likely to rely on emergency services or face legal issues, leading to overall cost savings for taxpayers. Studies have shown that adequate support reduces the need for emergency medical care and decreases the likelihood of incarceration, which can result in significant savings for the state (Harris, 2022). Highlighting the long-term financial implications can sway middle-ground supporters who may be concerned about fiscal responsibility and the efficient use of public funds.

### ***Moral Obligation to Support Vulnerable Populations***

Many individuals hold strong values around compassion and social justice. Framing TANF reform as a moral imperative—reflecting the community's responsibility to care for its most vulnerable members—can resonate deeply with potential supporters. Research by Davis (2020) indicates that communities with stronger safety nets experience lower crime rates, better health outcomes, and more cohesive social structures. Supporting vulnerable populations is a moral responsibility and a pathway to a healthier, more equitable society. By appealing to shared values of empathy and community support, you can encourage middle-ground supporters to align with the advocacy plan out of a sense of moral duty.

### ***Evidence of Successful TANF Reforms in Other States***

Increasing TANF benefits have positively impacted other states, demonstrating the feasibility and effectiveness of such reforms. For example, in Washington State, where TANF benefits were increased by 15%, studies found decreased child poverty rates and improved child health outcomes (Green & Mason, 2019). Similarly, New York's investment in expanding TANF benefits led to improved educational outcomes for children and a significant reduction in emergency medical visits (Williams & Thompson, 2021). These examples provide concrete evidence that TANF reforms can improve family outcomes and enhance community well-being. Concrete examples of successful implementation can build confidence in the advocacy plan, making it more appealing to supporters looking for evidence-based solutions.

### ***Strengthening Family Stability and Reducing Generational Poverty***

Expanding TANF benefits is a powerful tool for reducing generational poverty and strengthening family stability. Adequate financial support helps ensure that children grow up in stable homes, which has been shown to have long-term positive impacts on their mental health, academic achievement, and future employment outcomes (Johnson & Park, 2020). By providing families with the resources they need to meet basic needs, the state can help break the cycle of poverty that often spans multiple generations. This argument appeals to those concerned about Tennessee's children's future and the broader societal implications of poverty. It underscores the importance of investing in the next generation, demonstrating

that reforms to TANF can result in long-term social and economic benefits for the state by helping families achieve lasting self-sufficiency and breaking cycles of disadvantage.

By employing these arguments, the advocacy group can effectively engage potential supporters who may be sitting on the fence. Tailoring the messaging to address their concerns, values, and interests can help build a broader coalition supporting the advocacy plan for TANF reform in Tennessee.

### **Legislative Allies and Detractors**

The Legislator's Map (see Appendix B) categorizes legislators into four groups based on their positions on TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) policies. The Supporters group includes Rep. Steve Cohen, who advocates for increased funding for TANF and emphasizes the importance of social safety nets. The Leaning Supporters group features Rep. Marsha Blackburn, who supports TANF reforms aimed at helping families and stresses the need for effective allocation of funds. On the opposing side, the Leaning Detractors group includes Rep. Mark Green, who expresses concerns about difficulties in increasing funding and supports the introduction of stricter program requirements. Lastly, the Detractors group is represented by Rep. Tim Burchett, who focuses on enforcing strict efficiency measures for TANF and prioritizes evaluating its outcomes.

### **Opposition**

#### ***Concerns About Dependency on Government Assistance***

One argument presented by critics of increasing TANF benefits is the concern that it could lead to long-term dependency on government assistance. Opponents believe that increasing benefits or expanding eligibility could disincentivize recipients from seeking employment or striving for financial independence. This argument is based on the idea that self-sufficiency should be the primary goal of social assistance programs. Critics often suggest that more generous benefits may create a culture of

reliance, discouraging recipients from pursuing job opportunities or enhancing their skills (Smith & Jones, 2022).

This concern resonates with individuals who prioritize personal responsibility. They may fear that increasing benefits could undermine recipients' work ethic and independence. This argument is particularly prevalent among those who advocate for welfare-to-work policies and those who emphasize the importance of earning one's living through employment. However, research suggests that increased benefits do not significantly reduce employment motivation when combined with employment programs and job training (Clark & Allen, 2021).

### ***Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Constraints***

Opponents may also express concerns regarding the financial feasibility of TANF reforms, particularly during times of economic uncertainty. Critics argue that increasing TANF benefits could strain state budgets, resulting in higher taxes or cuts to other social programs. They argue that public assistance programs must be closely aligned with available resources, and expanding them without clear funding sources could lead to fiscal instability (Taylor, 2023).

However, this argument may not hold in the context of the proposed TANF reforms. The state of Tennessee currently has a large surplus of unspent TANF funds, which presents a clear and available funding source for increasing benefits (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2023-a). Additionally, studies from other states that have increased TANF payments without resulting in negative fiscal outcomes may counterbalance concerns about overextending budgets (Harris & Baker, 2022).

### ***Administrative Challenges and Implementation***

A common concern critics express is the administrative challenges and potential inefficiencies associated with TANF reform. Opponents argue that changes to the TANF program, such as adjusting eligibility criteria or increasing the number of recipients, could complicate the administrative process. For

example, more extensive eligibility reviews or increased benefits require more staffing or could lead to delays in service delivery, exacerbating current operational difficulties. However, it is important to note that the current proposed policy changes focus on simplifying eligibility criteria and improving the efficiency of benefits distribution (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2023-c).

These changes are designed to improve efficiency rather than create additional complexity by focusing on streamlining administrative processes and reducing barriers to benefit access. Implementing an automated eligibility system and reducing bureaucratic paperwork could help mitigate concerns about administrative hurdles, making the reform more effective in serving families in need (Williams, 2024).

By understanding and addressing the opposition's arguments, the group can refine the advocacy plan for TANF reform in Tennessee. Engaging with concerns about dependency, fiscal responsibility, and administrative challenges allows for developing well-supported counterarguments. It ensures that the proposed changes are positioned as both feasible and beneficial for families in need. Focusing on the availability of surplus funds, the streamlined nature of the proposed policy, and evidence from other states will help overcome resistance and secure broader support for the reforms.

### **Plans to Form a Coalition**

This policy plan advocates for the revival of Tennessee SB 1961/HB 2397, which seeks to increase the base payment for TANF-eligible families to reflect the percentage change in inflation over the previous two calendar years, beginning January 1, 2025. A combination of logical partners and unexpected allies is essential to building an effective coalition to advocate this amendment. This diverse coalition will enable the campaign to appeal to various stakeholders with varied interests, strengthening support for the proposed policy change. In this coalition, logical partners and odd bedfellows were identified.

#### **Logical Partners**

***Tennessee Valley Coalition for the Homeless (TVCH)***

The Tennessee Valley Coalition for the Homeless (TVCH) is a natural ally in the campaign for SB 1961/HB 2397 due to its direct service to populations severely impacted by poverty and homelessness. TVCH's role will be to advocate for improved access to TANF funds, which will provide much-needed financial stability for its clients and reduce homelessness. The coalition's extensive network will help gather testimonials from affected individuals, demonstrating the tangible benefits of TANF expansion in reducing homelessness. By mobilizing its resources, TVCH will be instrumental in emphasizing the positive outcomes of enhanced financial support for vulnerable populations.

***Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS)***

As the agency responsible for the distribution of TANF benefits, the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) will play an indispensable role in ensuring that the proposed amendments to the bill are feasible and aligned with existing regulations. TDHS's role will be to provide technical expertise and offer guidance on implementation strategies. Additionally, TDHS can provide data on the positive outcomes associated with increased TANF accessibility, helping persuade policymakers of this reform's importance. Their involvement will reinforce the campaign's credibility and ensure that the proposed changes are realistic and actionable.

***United Way of Greater Nashville***

The United Way of Greater Nashville is a crucial ally because it focuses on poverty alleviation and family support. Their role will be to mobilize financial resources, public advocacy, and community partnerships to support the campaign for TANF reform. The United Way's extensive network will help raise awareness about the bill and emphasize the importance of TANF reform, collecting testimonials and data from families directly affected by poverty. By engaging a broad range of stakeholders, the United

Way will facilitate a community-wide initiative that promotes the campaign's goals and strengthens its reach (United Way Greater Nashville, 2024).

### ***Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope (MICAH)***

MICAH's economic and social justice commitment aligns closely with the campaign's objectives. Their role will be to use their faith-based platform to advocate for TANF reform as a matter of justice and compassion. MICAH will mobilize faith communities and grassroots supporters to influence lawmakers, framing the issue of poverty alleviation as a moral imperative. Also, MICAH can organize community events to engage citizens, creating a narrative highlighting poverty alleviation as a societal and spiritual responsibility, thus adding a strong moral voice to the campaign.

### ***Tennessee Voices for Children***

Tennessee Voices for Children will play a pivotal role in advocating for the well-being of children affected by poverty. Their role will be to provide compelling testimonials from families impacted by inadequate TANF support, illustrating the direct benefits of increased funding. By focusing on children's mental health and family stability, Tennessee Voices for Children will underscore the necessity of TANF reform in improving the conditions of vulnerable children and fostering healthier family environments. Their involvement will be crucial in highlighting the long-term impact that TANF reform can have on children's futures.

### **Odd Bedfellows**

#### ***Law Enforcement Agencies***

Although law enforcement typically does not directly align with welfare initiatives, their role will be crucial in supporting the SB 1961/HB 2397 campaign due to the link between poverty reduction and lower crime rates. Research by Rosenfeld et al. (2007) suggests that economic instability and poverty are significant contributors to criminal activity, and policies aimed at alleviating poverty can reduce societal

stressors that lead to crime. In this context, law enforcement agencies will advocate for the policy change by framing TANF reform as a public safety measure. They will emphasize that increasing financial support for low-income families through TANF adjustments will help reduce crime rates, particularly in communities experiencing high levels of poverty. By presenting TANF reform as an investment in community safety, law enforcement agencies will help sway policymakers who prioritize public safety, thereby contributing to the broader social justice goals of the campaign.

### ***Real Estate Developers and Landlords Associations***

Although they primarily focused on housing markets, real estate developers and landlords will support TANF reform for its potential economic benefits. Increased TANF grants will lead to more financially stable tenants, reducing eviction rates and ensuring consistent rental income. Their role will involve advocating for the amendment as beneficial to tenants and landlords, offering a pragmatic, business-oriented perspective that will attract support from lawmakers concerned with economic stability. By highlighting the positive impact on the rental market, real estate developers and landlords will help broaden the campaign's support base.

### ***Agriculture and Farming Associations***

Rural poverty destabilizes local economies, and these associations will support the campaign if they recognize that increased TANF funding can strengthen rural communities. Their role will involve emphasizing how poverty reduction can stabilize local economies and enhance labor market stability. Engaging agricultural associations will widen the campaign's influence in rural areas and attract support from policymakers focused on agricultural interests. By positioning TANF reform as a tool to promote economic resilience in rural communities, agricultural and farming associations will play an essential role in garnering cross-sector support for the campaign.

By involving logical partners and unexpected allies, the advocacy campaign can create a comprehensive coalition with diverse interests. Logical partners bring expertise, resources, and community support, while odd bedfellows offer pragmatic arguments for policy change. This coalition strengthens the case for amending Tennessee's TANF policy, demonstrating that poverty reduction has far-reaching benefits for public safety, economic stability, and community well-being. This multifaceted approach enhances the likelihood of successful policy reform.

## **Media Campaign**

### **Target Audiences and Desired Actions for the TANF Advocacy Campaign**

To effectively advocate for the proposed changes to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Tennessee, it is crucial to identify the key audiences that will be most receptive to the campaign's message and to outline the specific actions these groups should take to help achieve the policy aims. The campaign will target four primary audiences: policymakers, low-income families, community organizations, and the general public. Each group plays a distinct role in ensuring the campaign's success and the eventual legislative change.

#### ***Policymakers***

State legislators, particularly those involved in budgeting and social services, including members of the Tennessee General Assembly and the Governor's Office, are one target audience. The primary action for policymakers is to advocate for and pass Senate Bill 1961/House Bill 2397, which seeks to adjust TANF benefits for inflation. This will involve supporting the legislation in committee discussions, voting in favor of the bill, and allocating the necessary resources for implementation.

#### ***Low-Income Families***

Another target audience will be individuals and families currently receiving TANF benefits or those eligible for assistance in Tennessee. Low-income families will be encouraged to engage in advocacy by contacting their local legislators to express support for increased TANF benefits. This can include signing petitions, participating in grassroots campaigns, or attending town hall meetings to voice their needs and experiences with the current TANF program. Additionally, families should be informed of their eligibility for benefits and encouraged to apply for assistance if they haven't already done so.

### ***Community Organizations***

Another target audience will be local nonprofits, advocacy groups, and faith-based organizations focused on poverty alleviation, social services, and family welfare in Tennessee. Community organizations can help mobilize their networks by amplifying the campaign message and encouraging their constituents to participate in advocacy efforts. This includes hosting informational sessions, facilitating letter-writing campaigns to legislators, and organizing rallies or town hall discussions. Organizations can also assist in educating the public about the importance of adjusting TANF benefits to better meet the needs of struggling families and the overall economy.

### ***General Public***

Another target audience will be Tennessee residents, especially those who may not be directly affected by TANF but are invested in social justice, economic stability, and poverty reduction. The general public will be encouraged to share the campaign's message via social media, engage in public awareness activities, and sign petitions supporting the adjustment of TANF benefits. Additionally, the campaign will seek public endorsements from influential community leaders, business figures, and celebrities to gain broader visibility and increase pressure on policymakers.

The advocacy campaign aims to build a coalition of support for TANF reforms by targeting these key audiences. Through collective action, policymakers will be more likely to address the significant gaps

in the TANF program, helping to provide greater financial support to low-income families and reduce poverty in Tennessee.

### **Media Avenues**

In the advocacy campaign for the passage of SB 1961 (HB 2397), the TANF advocacy group will be using a range of social media and non-social media approaches to audiences to gain awareness and show support for adjusting Tennessee's TANF benefits. The primary resources that will be used are listed below.

#### ***Traditional, non-social media sites***

The group will work with local and well-established newspapers such as *The Tennessean* and *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. This will reach older and more politically engaged demographics across Tennessee who may support the initiative once informed. Local newspapers have a high trust factor among readers, particularly on issues affecting families and economic stability (Pew Research Center, 2022). The group will also use local radio stations like Nashville Public Radio (WPLN) to focus on listeners during drive times. Radio plays an important role when trying to reach communities across different socioeconomic backgrounds, especially in some rural areas without internet access.

#### ***Social Media Sites***

Websites like Facebook and X can help the group reach those active on these sites. Progress of the bill and human-interest stories from people affected by low TANF benefits will be posted. X can be used for real-time engagement with those who make policies and specific influencers. Additionally, the group can use Instagram and TikTok to post short video stories to connect with a younger audience interested in social policies and those who want to participate. By using visual stories, the group can communicate with individuals personally and focus on some of their own stories when dealing with the situation.

### ***Other Avenues***

The group will also look into hosting some town hall meetings, informative soap boxes, and forums. These events will be held at local churches, community centers, and public aid offices. This will be a place where individuals can learn about the TANF bill and share personal stories of how they have been affected. Another reason for these nonsocial media forums is that they will allow those to ask questions and have them answered in person. The group will also distribute flyers stating additional information (see Appendix C). This flyer will include a QR code to take the reader to our dedicated website. The group will also create a website called “[www.tanfadvocacylink.com](http://www.tanfadvocacylink.com)” dedicated to this campaign, which will serve as the leading site for information, including data on Tennessee TANF benefits compared to inflation, personal stories, and calls to action. This site will also offer easy ways for visitors to contact their legislators, sign petitions, and make donations. Additionally, the group will work with other agencies and advocacy groups. This will allow the group to organize drives for petitions and go door to door to let communities know about the petition change and receive signatures. Direct outreach to lawmakers, particularly during session periods, will emphasize constituent support.

### ***Decision Rationale***

Research shows that different platform approaches increase public awareness and engagement by allowing messages to reach diverse demographic groups with other online and offline present. An example would be that it is more cost-effective to achieve a broad audience quickly, with Facebook having relevance in political engagement campaigns, primarily due to older audience engagement (Pew Research Center, 2023). Meanwhile, local newspapers and radio stations remain essential in Tennessee for reaching residents across urban and rural areas, especially where trust in local media remains higher than in national outlets (Knight Foundation, 2023). Lastly, the advocacy website will ensure that all the information is available in one location and offers tools for action, crucial for maintaining momentum throughout the legislative process.

## **Media Content**

### ***About the Campaign***

The campaign supporting SB 1961/HB 2397 aims to advocate for adjustments to Tennessee's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payments in response to inflation. The campaign highlights the impact of rising living costs on low-income families who rely on TANF support to meet basic needs, such as housing, food, and healthcare. By proposing an annual inflation adjustment, the bill aims to preserve the purchasing power of TANF benefits, preventing erosion over time and ensuring that assistance remains aligned with the real cost of living. Starting on January 1, at the beginning of the legislative cycle, this adjustment would be based on inflation rates from the previous two years, providing families with more reliable and sustainable support in Tennessee's economic climate (LegiScan, 2024).

### ***The Need for TANF Adjustments***

The need for TANF adjustments is clear, given that Tennessee's TANF benefits have not been adjusted for inflation, leading many families to struggle with the rising costs of basic needs such as housing, food, and transportation. Without inflation-based adjustments, the real value of these benefits erodes over time, putting low-income families at risk of increased financial insecurity. For example, TANF recipients in Tennessee are often unable to afford consistent housing and adequate nutrition, leading to higher levels of food insecurity and housing instability. Food insecurity alone affects around 16% of Tennessee's children, making it harder for families to maintain stability and meet essential needs (Urban Institute, 2024; Feeding America, 2024).

### ***Benefits of the Policy***

Adjusting TANF benefits for inflation offers several critical advantages for families and communities. Improved financial stability is one of the most significant benefits, as it provides families

with a more reliable source of support to maintain stability despite rising costs. By avoiding deeper poverty, inflation-adjusted benefits enable families to better meet their basic needs, which in turn promotes positive outcomes for children's health, education, and overall well-being. Additionally, this adjustment strengthens local economies, as increased TANF benefits are typically spent on essentials within local communities, boosting local businesses and stabilizing regional economies.

The passage of SB 1961/HB 2397, which ties TANF benefits to inflation, promises significant benefits for Tennessee's low-income families. Adjusting payments in line with rising costs provides a more reliable financial safety net, helping families maintain stability despite fluctuating expenses. This financial predictability is essential in preventing families from falling deeper into poverty as inflation erodes the purchasing power of fixed benefits (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2023). Furthermore, ensuring that TANF benefits reflect inflation can help meet essential needs such as food, housing, and healthcare, thereby improving the health, education, and overall well-being of children in these families (Wadhvani, 2024). Beyond the individual family level, increased TANF benefits are typically spent on local essentials, such as groceries and utilities, injecting more money into regional economies and supporting local businesses (Wadhvani, 2024). In this way, the bill helps vulnerable families and contributes to the overall economic stability of communities across Tennessee.

### ***Invitation to Join the Coalition***

Joining the coalition is simple, and your support can make a significant difference in advocating for SB 1961/HB 2397. We are proud to collaborate with a network of organizations dedicated to securing economic support for Tennessee families. The campaign partners include the Tennessee Valley Coalition for the Homeless (TVCH), the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS), United Way of Greater Nashville (United Way), Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope (MICAH), Tennessee Voices for Children (Tennessee Voices), the Vera Institute of Justice (n.d.), and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (Agricultural Enterprise Fund).

You can participate in advocacy actions by contacting legislators using your zip code to send a pre-written email or personally reach out to your state Senator or Representative to express your support for inflation-adjusted TANF payments. Spread awareness on social media by downloading and sharing campaign graphics, hashtags (#SupportTANFAdjustment), and sample posts. Additionally, you can attend local advocacy events, rallies, or community meetings to show your support and connect with fellow advocates.

Another way to get involved is to volunteer. Sign up for opportunities to help with campaign outreach, event planning, and grassroots organizing. By joining the coalition, you're advocating for a future where Tennessee families receive the support they need to thrive. Together, we can make a meaningful impact.

### ***News & Updates***

Stay informed and engaged with the latest developments as the group advocates for SB 1961/HB 2397. Follow the progress of SB 1961/HB 2397 as it moves through Tennessee's legislative process. We'll share updates on key committee votes, public hearings, and legislators' positions on the bill, including their public statements regarding TANF adjustments. Be the first to know about upcoming community meetings, rallies, and training workshops that support the campaign.

Stay updated with news on endorsements from organizations, community leaders, and public figures backing SB 1961/HB 2397. Read inspiring highlights from families and communities showcasing the potential positive impact of inflation-adjusted TANF payments. By staying updated, you'll be equipped to contribute effectively to the campaign and witness the strides we're making toward a brighter future for Tennessee families.

### ***Resources***

Explore our collection of research and educational materials to comprehensively understand TANF, inflation, and their socio-economic impacts on families. These resources highlight the importance of adjusting TANF payments for inflation to support Tennessee's most vulnerable populations. Learn more about TANF, a federally funded program providing financial assistance and services to low-income families to promote self-sufficiency. Review current statistics on TANF usage in Tennessee and insights into the program's payment limitations. Additionally, you can explore inflation trends and their specific impact on low-income households across the state. Our collection also includes government reports and other valuable materials to deepen your knowledge of these critical issues.

### ***Contact Legislators***

**Phone Call Script.** Use this guide to contact legislators by phone. Begin with an introduction: “Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I’m a resident of [Your City/Town]. I am calling to express my support for SB 1961/HB 2397.” Move on to the message: “This bill is vital because it proposes to adjust TANF payments to reflect inflation, ensuring that low-income families in Tennessee receive the support they need to meet rising costs. Without this adjustment, families struggle to afford necessities, affecting their overall well-being and stability.” Make a clear request: “I urge [Legislator’s Name] to support this important legislation. Thank you for your time, and I hope to see action taken to help Tennessee families.” End with a polite closing: “Have a great day!”

**Email Template.** Use this script to contact legislators by email. Subject Line: Support for SB 1961/HB 2397: Adjust TANF Payments for Inflation. Begin with an introduction: “I hope this message finds you well. My name is [Your Name], and I reside in [Your City/Town]. I am reaching out to express my strong support for SB 1961/HB 2397.” Continue with the main body: “This bill is crucial for the well-being of low-income families in Tennessee. By adjusting TANF payments to account for inflation, we can ensure that families have the resources they need to meet their basic needs, especially as the cost of living continues to rise. Inflation disproportionately affects those with fixed incomes, and without an

adjustment, many families are at risk of deeper poverty and instability.” Conclude with a call to action: “I urge you to support this legislation and advocate for the needs of our community. Thank you for considering my request.” End with a formal closing: “Sincerely, [Your Name] [Your Contact Information].”

**Social Media Message.** Template for Twitter/X: “Please support SB 1961/HB 2397 to adjust TANF payments for inflation. Families in Tennessee need our help to keep up with rising costs! #SupportTANFAdjustment.” Template for Facebook: “Dear [Legislator’s Name], I urge you to support SB 1961/HB 2397, which adjusts TANF payments to reflect inflation. This change is essential for the stability of low-income families in Tennessee. Thank you for your attention to this important issue!”

### ***Social Media Pages***

The social media pages feature informative posts that explain the significance of TANF and highlight the challenges inflation poses for low-income families. The group will include shareable graphics illustrating how the proposed policy adjustments benefit families and the local economy. Additionally, the group will share real-life testimonials and quotes from coalition partners who endorse the policy change, providing a personal and relatable perspective. Pinned posts include direct links to key resources on TANF, pages for contacting legislators, and petitions hosted on the campaign website to encourage engagement and advocacy.

### **Media Message Content**

Advertisements will feature compelling captions such as "Help Tennessee Families Keep Up with Inflation!" and "Adjust TANF for Real-World Costs, Support SB 1961." These messages highlight the importance of supporting low-income families through inflation-adjusted TANF payments.

Social media posts will include various platforms. On Twitter, sample tweets such as "Tennessee families deserve TANF that keeps up with inflation. Support #ReviveSB1961!" and "#SupportTANFAdjustment-Advocate for a sustainable future for Tennessee families" will be used. On Facebook and Instagram, graphics with captions like "SB 1961 supports families as costs rise. Let's give TANF-eligible families the stability they need" will effectively convey the campaign's message.

Letters to editors will be submitted to highlight how inflation-adjusted TANF payments can promote economic stability and reduce child poverty in Tennessee. Press releases will announce coalition activities and campaign milestones, informing the public and media about progress. Flyers will also be distributed summarizing the campaign's significance, objectives, and ways for community members to get involved.

At community events, handouts such as a fact sheet and a policy brief (see Appendices D & E) will provide detailed information on SB 1961, the advantages of inflation-adjusted TANF payments, and opportunities to join advocacy efforts. Giveaways, including branded buttons and stickers with #SupportTANFAdjustment and the campaign website URL, will help spread awareness. Simple, impactful talking points like "TANF helps families in need. SB 1961 will ensure this support keeps up with inflation, providing a stable foundation for Tennessee families" will be used to engage and inform attendees effectively.

## **Implementation Steps**

### **Campaign Media Strategies and Non-Media Activities Implementation Plan**

The following is a detailed timeline for implementing the media strategies and non-media activities for the campaign in support of Senate Bill 1961 and House Bill 2397, which seeks to adjust TANF payments in Tennessee to reflect inflation.

***Preparation Phase (November 2024)*****Step 1: Research & Resource Development.**

***Date.*** November 5–10, 2024

***Description.*** Develop educational resources about TANF, inflation, and the need for adjustments. This includes gathering data on current TANF benefits, inflation rates, and how similar policies have impacted other states.

***Responsible Party.*** Research Team

**Step 2: Website and Social Media Setup**

***Date.*** November 10–15, 2024

***Description.*** Create and launch the campaign website, setting up Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram social media pages. Ensure the website has sections for updates, advocacy actions, and resource materials.

***Responsible Party.*** Web and Social Media Team

***Initial Launch & Awareness Phase (December 2024)*****Step 3: Press Release Distribution**

***Date.*** December 1–5, 2024

***Description.*** Distribute a press release announcing the campaign’s official launch and the introduction of SB 1961/HB 2397. Highlight the need for inflation adjustments and the impact on Tennessee families.

**Responsible Party.** Public Relations Team

#### **Step 4: Social Media Campaign Launch**

**Date.** December 5–10, 2024

**Description.** Post an introductory campaign message on all social media platforms. Share the campaign’s mission, objectives, and how individuals can support SB 1961/HB 2397 through petitions, contacting legislators, and attending local events.

**Responsible Party.** Social Media Team

#### **Advocacy and Engagement Phase (January–February 2025)**

#### **Step 5: Email & Phone Scripts for Legislator Outreach**

**Date.** January 15–20, 2025

**Description.** Provide pre-written emails and phone scripts to supporters for contacting state legislators. Encourage supporters to use these scripts to support inflation-adjusted TANF payments.

**Responsible Party.** Outreach Team

#### **Step 6: Volunteer Recruitment and Training**

**Date.** January 25–30, 2025

**Description.** Recruit volunteers for in-person events and phone banking. Provide training on advocating for SB 1961/HB 2397 and inform volunteers about talking points for interacting with the public and legislators.

**Responsible Party.** Volunteer Coordination Team

***Event and Grassroots Mobilization Phase (February–March 2025)***

**Step 7: Community Event Planning and Outreach**

***Date.*** February 1–10, 2025

***Description.*** Organize and promote community meetings, rallies, and town halls. Encourage local participation through email blasts, social media posts, and flyers.

***Responsible Party.*** Event Planning Team

**Step 8: Media Outreach and Advertisements**

***Date.*** February 15–20, 2025

***Description.*** Launch paid media advertisements on social media and local news outlets, focusing on the importance of SB 1961/HB 2397 and how it will help families across Tennessee.

***Responsible Party.*** Media Buying Team

***Legislative Advocacy and Monitoring Phase (April–May 2025)***

**Step 9: Legislative Follow-up and Mobilization**

***Date.*** April 1–10, 2025

***Description.*** Monitor the progress of SB 1961/HB 2397 in the state legislature. Organize follow-up calls and emails to legislators, particularly those undecided or on the fence about the bill.

***Responsible Party.*** Legislative Advocacy Team

**Step 10: Final Push and Public Demonstrations**

***Date.*** May 1–5, 2025

***Description.*** Organize a final public rally or demonstration, gathering supporters to show their continued backing for SB 1961/HB 2397 as it moves toward a vote. Continue to push for media coverage and public support.

***Responsible Party.*** Event Coordination and Media Outreach Teams

### ***Post-Campaign Phase (June 2025)***

#### **Step 11: Campaign Evaluation and Reporting**

***Date.*** June 1–10, 2025

***Description.*** Evaluate the campaign's success, tracking the number of supporters, media coverage, event participation, and legislative action taken on SB 1961/HB 2397. Prepare a report on campaign outcomes and lessons learned.

***Responsible Party.*** Campaign Evaluation Team

### **Advocacy Plan**

#### **Focus and Target Population**

SB 1961/HB 2397 seeks to support Tennessee's low-income families by adjusting Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payments to reflect the effect of inflation. The policy aims to alleviate financial hardships faced by parents, caregivers, children, extended family members, and other kin as legal guardians. To ensure the policy is effective and meets the needs of its beneficiaries, it incorporates strategies for their active involvement in its development and implementation. The intended beneficiaries of the policy for the advocacy plan are:

Parents and caregivers will be crucial in guiding the policy through participation in advisory committees, needs assessments, and advocacy efforts. Sharing their experiences with challenges such as childcare costs and housing instability will help shape the policy to meet their needs better. Furthermore, parents will have access to workshops focusing on financial literacy, parenting strategies, and job opportunities, which will help them make the most of the increased TANF support. They will also be encouraged to participate in public hearings and advocacy events to share personal stories, making the case for why the policy is essential for their families (Tennessee General Assembly, 2024).

Children in TANF-eligible households will benefit from increased access to basic resources such as better nutrition, stable housing, and educational programs. While the policy benefits children indirectly, parents will advocate for their children's specific needs, ensuring that the policy prioritizes children's health, education, and future opportunities. In addition, the policy will support after-school care, tutoring, and other services that foster children's development and academic success (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2023).

Extended family members and legal guardians, such as grandparents and other kin, can actively advocate policy through specific, structured opportunities. These caregivers, who often face additional financial and emotional burdens in raising children, will be invited to participate in advisory roles where they can share their unique challenges. Tailored services will be provided to support their involvement, including respite care, counseling, and financial assistance for kinship care. These services will help alleviate some of the pressures they face and ensure their active engagement. Legal guardians and extended family members will also be encouraged to participate in advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about the impact of policies on their caregiving responsibilities, ensuring their voices are heard in the policy-making process (United Way, 2022).

To ensure the policy is responsive to the needs of all beneficiaries, continuous feedback will be collected from beneficiaries through surveys, community forums, and other channels. Beneficiaries will

be encouraged to share their input, ensuring the policy evolves based on their lived experiences. Additionally, collaboration with community organizations will help expand outreach, ensuring that families are well-informed about the policy's benefits. Training and support will also be provided to empower beneficiaries to advocate for themselves, ensuring that their voices are included in ongoing policy discussions (United Way, 2022).

Beneficiaries, particularly low-income families, may actively participate in every SB 1961/HB 2397 campaign phase. They will participate in focus groups, town hall meetings, and advocacy events to share their personal stories about the impact of TANF benefits. These contributions will shape the campaign's messaging and highlight the need for increased financial support. Beneficiaries will also engage in letter-writing campaigns, social media advocacy, and meetings with policymakers to emphasize the importance of raising TANF payments for long-term family stability and opportunities. Their participation will ensure the campaign remains authentic and impactful.

## **Advocacy Strategies**

### ***Effective Strategies to Persuade Legislators and the General Public***

Several strategies can be used to effectively persuade policy legislators and the general public to support legislation. These strategies involve building strategic relationships, developing a clear and unified solution, appealing to values and beliefs, amplifying the issue to audiences, and using human interest stories to complement evidence.

**Building Strategic Relationships.** An effective strategy that can be implemented in this policy plan involves building strategic relationships with decision-makers and stakeholders. An article by Cullerton et al., 2018 notes that building relationships helps to build trust and credibility with stakeholders, leading to potential coalitions and alliances. Interviewees of this study stated that having relationships through coalitions and alliances signals to decision-makers that there is considerable

support, increasing the likelihood of being heard and recognized by change-makers (Cullerton et al., 2018). The study also highlighted that creating coalitions and alliances is particularly helpful for poorly resourced organizations to pool resources and better coordinate advocacy efforts, possibly resulting in more substantial legislative support. Also, building relationships with those covering a wide range of interests, skills, and personal contacts is essential for effectively gathering new intelligence and engaging others, such as policy leaders, in new ideas (Cullerton et al., 2018). Another study by Mahoney and Baumgartner (2015) also states that policymakers are less likely to support advocacy efforts if they lack the necessary support of alliances and stakeholders. Thus, building relationships and creating alliances with various groups is essential to influence policy and decision-makers.

**Developing a Clear, Unified Solution.** Another effective strategy for persuading decision-makers and gaining public support involves developing a clear, unified solution that will allow audiences to be fully informed and engaged with the advocacy efforts. Cullerton et al. (2018) note that humans often resort to making decisions using cognitive shortcuts due to limited resources to process stimuli. This naturally occurring process renders many people, including policymakers, unable to analyze complex information needed to make decisions promptly and exhaustively (Cullerton et al., 2018). The study shows that the information presented as complicated and requiring complex solutions with little support is less likely to be understood and supported by policymakers. Thus, it is crucial to simplify the problem and the solution to influence policymakers and the general public effectively.

**Reframing the Issue to Appeal to Values and Beliefs.** A third strategy involves reframing the issue to appeal to values and beliefs. The study by Cullerton et al. (2018) discusses how everyone uses frames, which are cognitive shortcuts, to understand complex information efficiently. The most effective frames often appeal to shared societal values, which requires fully understanding the target audience and their values (Cullerton et al., 2018). Frames that have been successfully used often appeal to protecting the health of children, truth and honesty, fairness and social justice, and emphasizing the potential economic and social casualties associated with policy inaction (Kersh & Morone, 2002; Klein & Dietz,

2010; Freudenberg et al., 2009). By reframing the policy issue to highlight the needs of those in poverty in Tennessee, the TANF campaign is more likely to persuade policymakers and the public.

**Amplifying the Frame.** Similarly to the previous strategy, amplifying the frame is also an effective route to spread awareness and help eliminate the competition of other conflicting advocacy efforts. Cullerton et al. (2018) discuss three effective strategies for doing this: using the media, utilizing individuals in the policy network, and connecting with persons advocating for citizens personally affected by the issue at hand. These strategies effectively amplify the frame and influence policymakers and the general public.

One practical strategy to amplify the frame of the policy issue is using the media, which may involve utilizing various media platforms like news outlets, social media, and press releases to raise awareness (Bou-Karroum et al., 2017). Though this strategy is the most common method, it can be challenging to engage in some media efforts and ensure that the matter is reported using the desired frame (Cullerton et al., 2018).

Another strategy to amplify the frame involves utilizing various individuals strategically placed in the policy network, such as those in coalitions and those who can effectively coordinate advocacy efforts, to advocate for the issue (Cullerton et al., 2018). Recruiting as many individuals as possible is most effective since that will amplify the issue at hand with a more considerable number of decision-makers (Cullerton et al., 2018).

Also noted by Cullerton et al. (2018), utilizing human interest stories can also effectively persuade policymakers and the general public. This is due to personal stories' powerful effect on people, evoking emotion and an easier cognitive process when interpreting new information (Newman, 2003; Dawes, 1999). Using human interest stories can amplify the issue for policymakers and the public because people can analyze information more efficiently than complex data or statistics, making it more memorable and dominant than other information (Cullerton et al., 2018). Using human interest stories to

complement scientific evidence is also effective, particularly by presenting the evidence after the emotion-evoking narrative has been given (Cullerton et al., 2018; Mosley & Gibson, 2017).

To amplify the frame for policymakers and the public, the advocacy efforts pushing for direct TANF cash benefits using TANF surplus funds will be presented as a potential solution for those living in poverty in Tennessee. Advocacy efforts will engage with and recruit individuals and organizations to join the cause, broadening outreach and influence. Human interest stories of those struggling with insufficient TANF benefits can be shared to evoke empathy and build a stronger case for policy change.

### ***Engaging Minority, Oppressed, and Excluded Populations in Advocacy Efforts***

Many strategies can be undertaken to engage minority, oppressed, and excluded populations in advocacy efforts. These strategies include being active and obtaining community knowledge, creating supportive social contexts and building relationships, participating in community resource networks, and providing decision-making roles and engaged leadership.

One effective strategy Britton (2018) noted to engage such populations, particularly those in low-income communities, is to be active and obtain community knowledge. As a policy group advocating for those struggling in poverty, it is crucial to understand the represented communities and be actively involved in community affairs. Being active and knowing about the communities being advocated for allows for accountability and transparency, building trust and relationships with its constituents (Britton, 2018).

Another effective strategy to engage minority, oppressed, and excluded populations in advocacy efforts involves creating supportive social contexts and building relationships. In an article by Augsberger et al. (2020), building strong and supportive relationships among youth in foster care systems helped to encourage them to use their voices and make a difference in their state. Allowing youth to express themselves and their concerns and ideas can help build confidence and trust among other advocates, leading to networking and helping them further their own advocacy goals (Augsberger et al., 2019;

Augsberger et al., 2020). For advocacy efforts relating to TANF, building relationships and creating supportive social contexts among youth can effectively encourage them to engage in advocacy efforts.

An additional effective strategy involves participation in community resource networks. Britton (2018) noted that networks effectively engage with low-income communities, particularly ones involving non-profits and community members. Additionally, networking was found to be effective among youth in foster care, allowing them to connect with commissioners and directors, share policy information, and ultimately grow their own advocacy goals (Augsberger et al., 2019). Networking can effectively engage these populations in advocacy efforts relating to TANF.

One more effective strategy involves providing decision-making roles and engaged leadership. Britton (2018) notes the importance of involving all boards and committees in representing low-income communities for more effective engagement. Additionally, commissioners and directors can make decisions on behalf of vulnerable populations, such as youth in foster care, to build coalitions and discuss best practices and policies across states, leading to youth engagement in advocacy efforts (Augsberger et al., 2020). By involving vulnerable groups like low-income communities and youth in decision-making, they can be empowered to engage in policies like TANF benefit increases, creating more effective and equitable outcomes.

### **Inclusion of Target Population**

While involving consumers and beneficiaries in policy advocacy can offer some positive outcomes, it also presents significant negative impacts that can undermine the program's effectiveness. These challenges must be carefully addressed to avoid damaging the process and the individuals involved.

One of the most pressing negative impacts is re-traumatization. When beneficiaries are asked to share their personal, often painful, experiences to support policy changes, they may face emotional and psychological harm. Recounting traumatic events can reopen old wounds, potentially worsening their

mental health. This affects the individuals involved and can hinder the program's overall success, as beneficiaries may become disengaged or unwilling to participate in future advocacy efforts. The program must be cautious in how it approaches the sharing of personal stories to prevent emotional distress and ensure that participation does not lead to further harm.

Unequal representation is another critical issue. Beneficiaries from marginalized backgrounds often face barriers such as lack of time, financial constraints, or inadequate access to transportation, making their full involvement in advocacy difficult. This exclusion risks creating an advocacy process that does not truly reflect the diverse experiences and needs of the affected population. When certain voices are left out, the program's impact is weakened, as the policies developed may fail to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups. The lack of true representation can also undermine the legitimacy of the advocacy efforts, making it more difficult to garner broad support or achieve lasting change.

Exploitation of beneficiaries is a serious concern that can undermine the program's integrity. There is a risk that beneficiaries may be pressured to share their stories in ways that serve the agenda of the advocacy rather than genuinely representing their lived experiences. This manipulation of their narratives for strategic purposes can distort the true nature of the issues and lead to policies that do not reflect the full complexity of the challenges faced by these individuals. When beneficiaries feel that their voices are being exploited, trust in the program can be eroded, making future participation less likely and diminishing the overall effectiveness of the advocacy efforts.

Finally, time demands on beneficiaries can be a significant burden. Advocacy efforts often require substantial time commitments, which can be particularly challenging for families already overwhelmed with other responsibilities, such as work, childcare, and personal issues. These time constraints can exclude those most affected by the policy issues being addressed, diminishing the diversity and depth of perspectives needed for effective advocacy. As a result, the program may fail to capture the full range of

experiences and insights, limiting its ability to create policies that are truly impactful and relevant to the communities it aims to serve.

While involving beneficiaries in advocacy has potential benefits, the negative impacts highlighted here can undermine the program's overall goals. If these issues are not carefully managed, they can result in disengagement, diminished credibility, and a lack of meaningful policy change. Therefore, it is crucial that the program addresses these risks proactively, ensuring that the process remains inclusive, ethical, and respectful of the beneficiaries' well-being.

### **Elected Officials to Approach**

The commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Human Services is Clarence Carter. While his political party isn't known, Carter is the one in charge of the Tennessee Assistance of Needy Families (TANF), in which the staff in charge makes up the boundaries for TANF when families who are in need are eligible for it. Carter would have to have Trevor Lauri contact six other staff members, depending on the issue and section of the Human Services, to make decisions in the policy. The department also has to debate and vote on whether or not a certain policy has to be passed, as it is crucial for the agenda and floor votes. Since this revolves around the TANF, this would belong to Cherrell Campbell-Street, the Deputy Commissioner of Program and Services. Campbell-Street has access to child care and family support, so she is technically in charge of TANF. Through meetings, phone calls, or emails, it is very important to develop a plan for the department and legislators to get a policy or bill passed the gate.

### **Main Talking Points for Meeting with Elected Officials**

The advocacy group must present clear and compelling arguments as we prepare to advocate for necessary reforms to Tennessee's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Below are the key points that illustrate the urgency and opportunity for policy change:

#### ***The TANF Surplus and Opportunity for Reform***

Tennessee currently has a \$717 million Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) surplus (Wadhvani, 2024). This surplus represents an opportunity to enhance benefits without increasing the state budget.

### ***Current TANF Payment Levels Are Inadequate***

At \$387 per month, Tennessee's TANF payment ranks among the lowest in the nation, falling well below the federal poverty line (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2023). These payments fail to cover basic necessities like food, housing, and childcare, leaving families vulnerable.

### ***Proven Success in Other States***

States like California have successfully implemented policies that adjust TANF benefits annually to reflect inflation, reducing child poverty and improving family stability (Smith & Jones, 2022). Tennessee could replicate this model to achieve similar outcomes.

### ***Economic and Community Benefits***

Increasing TANF payments can have a multiplier effect on local economies. Research shows that families receiving adequate assistance are more likely to spend on local goods and services, thereby boosting community businesses (National Low Income Housing Coalition [NLIHC], 2023).

### ***Addressing Opposition Concerns***

Fiscal responsibility concerns are mitigated by the TANF surplus, which ensures financial sustainability. Evidence also shows that higher TANF benefits do not increase dependency but rather facilitate transitions to employment and financial independence through support for education and job training (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2023).

### ***A Moral and Social Justice Imperative***

Increasing TANF payments is not just a policy choice but a moral obligation to reduce poverty and inequality. Families should not have to choose between paying rent and feeding their children. The proposed policy demonstrates a commitment to social justice and economic mobility (Libby, 2011).

### **Progress Monitoring Plan**

Monitoring the progress of Senate Bill 1961/House Bill 2397, which seeks to adjust Tennessee's TANF benefits annually to reflect inflation, requires a systematic approach to track its journey from proposal to implementation. This plan includes stages for legislative tracking, stakeholder engagement, and post-implementation evaluation.

#### ***Legislative Tracking***

The first step involves following the bill's movement through the Tennessee legislature. Tools such as the Tennessee General Assembly's Bill Tracking System and public legislative hearings will provide real-time updates on the bill's status (Tennessee General Assembly, 2024). Engaging with legislative committee members and monitoring the dates for key hearings or votes will ensure that advocates can respond quickly to support or address concerns raised by lawmakers.

#### ***Stakeholder Engagement***

Consistent communication with stakeholders, including advocacy groups like the United Way and the Tennessee Economic Council on Women, will be maintained throughout the legislative process. Regular meetings and updates with these organizations will help identify challenges and opportunities as the bill progresses. Community members impacted by TANF, including those currently receiving benefits, will also be surveyed to collect testimonials that can bolster the bill's momentum and inform necessary amendments (NLIHC, 2023).

#### ***Implementation Monitoring***

After the bill's passage, monitoring its implementation is critical to ensure fidelity to the legislation's intent. To oversee the rollout, a task force composed of policymakers, social workers, and representatives from advocacy organizations will be established. Metrics such as the timeliness of benefit adjustments, the number of families served, and recipient satisfaction levels will be tracked quarterly (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2023).

### ***Evaluation and Feedback Loop***

Long-term evaluation will focus on the policy's impact on poverty rates, financial stability among TANF recipients, and the economic benefits to local communities. Research studies and partnerships with academic institutions will provide robust data to assess these outcomes. If needed, this feedback will be shared with legislators to propose further refinements or expansions (Libby, 2011).

By employing these strategies, the monitoring plan ensures transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement for SB 1961/HB 2397 as it progresses through its legislative journey and into practice.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the reintroduction and passage of Tennessee Senate Bill 1961/House Bill 2397 represent a critical step toward addressing the state's persistent poverty challenges. By increasing TANF base payments and indexing them to inflation, this policy would provide vital financial relief to low-income families, enhance their ability to meet basic needs and stimulate local economies. While opposition and potential implementation challenges exist, the proposed reforms offer an opportunity to improve resource allocation and promote economic stability for vulnerable populations across Tennessee. Advocacy and collaborative efforts will be essential to ensuring this legislation's successful adoption and impact.

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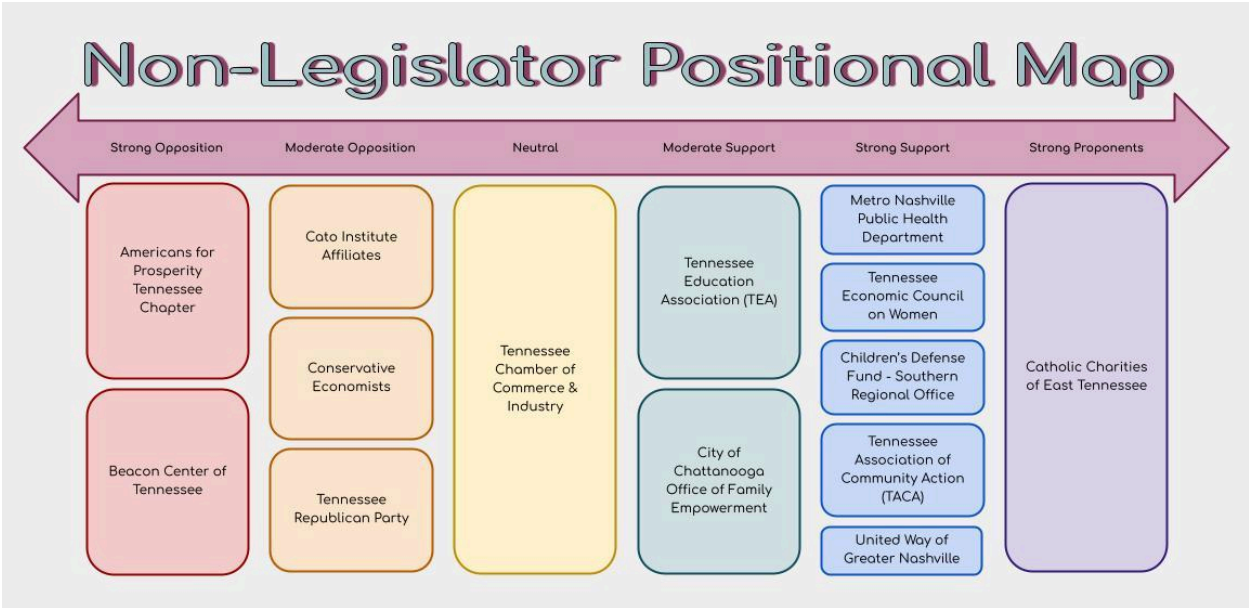
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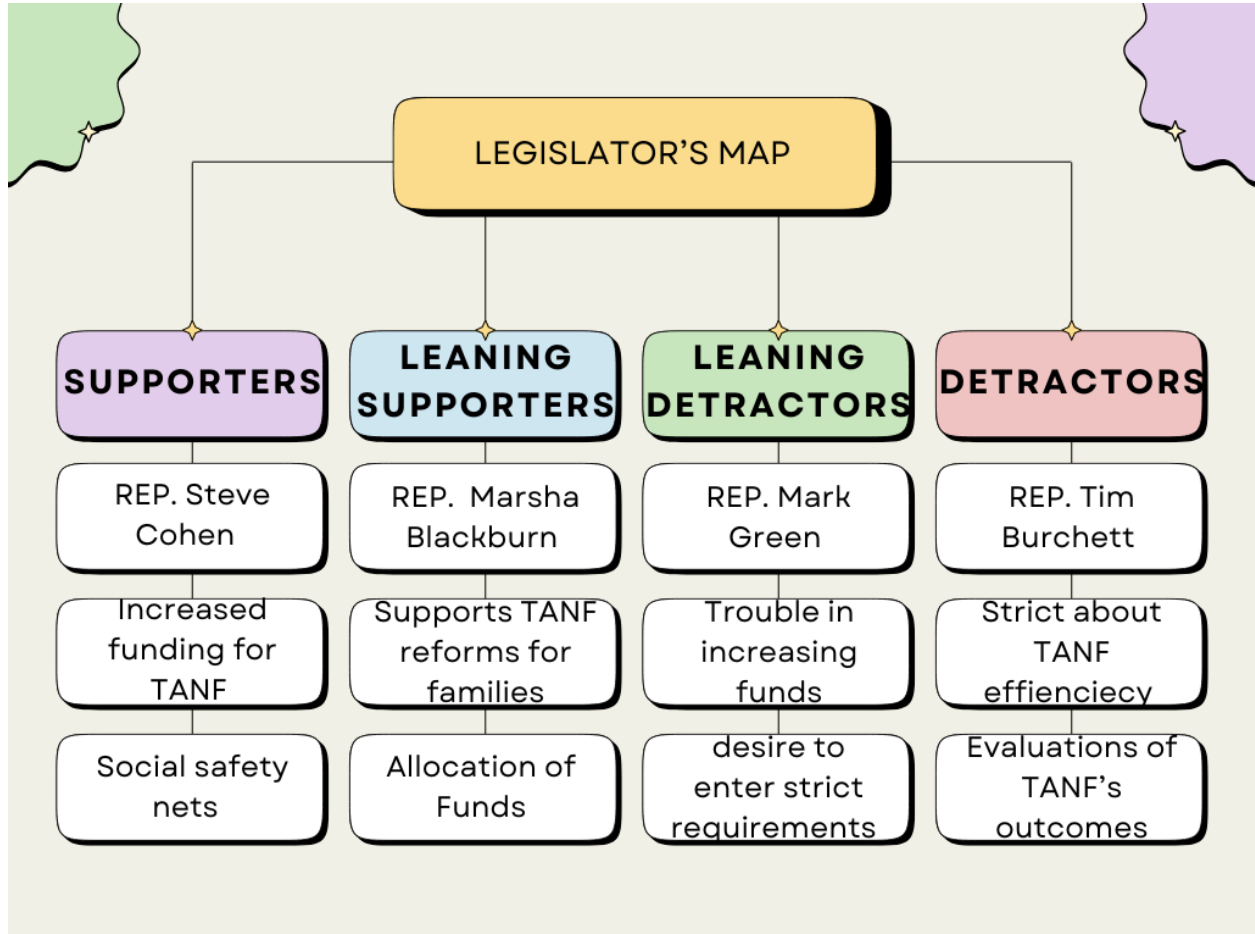
## Appendix A

### Non-Legislator Positional Map



## Appendix B

### Legislator's Map



## Appendix C

### Campaign Flyer

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE WHERE IT COUNTS!**

Please support SB 1961/HB 2397 to adjust TANF payments for inflation. Families in Tennessee need our help to keep up with rising costs!

#SupportTANFAdjustment

**Contact Information and Resources:**

Campaign Website: [www.TNfamilysupport.org](http://www.TNfamilysupport.org)

Contact Info:

Social media:

#SUPPORTTANFADJUSTMENT

**Support Tennessee Families: Adjust TANF Payments for Inflation.**



Find us online @ [www.TNfamilysupport.org](http://www.TNfamilysupport.org)

**#SUPPORTTANF ADJUSTMENT**

**Empowering Tennessee families to meet today's needs.**



### WHAT IS SB 1961/HB 2397?

This bill proposes to adjust Tennessee's TANF (temporary assistance for needy families) payments annually to reflect changes in inflation, beginning January 1, 2025. This would ensure TANF benefits keep up with the rising cost of living, helping families afford essentials like food, housing, and healthcare.

### WHY IT MATTERS?

Tennessee families who rely on TANF are facing financial hardship as inflation drives up prices. Without adjusting benefits, TANF families lose purchasing power every year, pushing many further into poverty.

### The Need for Inflation-Adjusted TANF Payments:

- **Inflation's impact on low-income families** - low-income families spend most of their income on essentials. As prices rise, these families struggle to cover basic needs, which increases the risk of housing insecurity, food scarcity, and financial stress. TANF payments must keep pace with inflation to provide meaningful support.
- **Benefits of adjusting TANF payments** - an inflation-adjusted TANF payment system will:
  - improve financial stability.
  - reduce poverty's impact on children and families.
  - strengthen local economies as families can afford necessities.



#SupportTANFAdjustment

### Join Us in Advocating for SB 1961/HB 2397.

#### How Can You Help?

- Join our coalition and stand up for Tennessee families.
- **Sign Up:** sign up on our website to receive updates and action alerts.
- **Contact Legislators:** Use our contact tools to call, email, or message your legislators and urge them to support SB 1961/HB 2397.
- **Spread the Word:** Share campaign messages on social media using #SupportTANFAdjustment and encourage friends to join the movement!
- **Get Involved in Events:**
  - Town hall meeting to be held at...
  -



## Appendix D

### Fact Sheet

	<h2>Spending TANF Surplus Funds</h2> <h3>Promoting the Increase of Direct Cash Assistance in Tennessee</h3>	
	<h4>What is the problem?</h4> <p><b>Poverty</b> is a persistent issue that affects communities by <b>limiting access</b> to essential resources, stalling economic growth, and contributing to adverse health, education, and social outcomes. Individuals and families living in poverty often <b>face barriers</b> to financial stability, which can create a cycle of <b>hardship</b> impacting multiple generations.</p> <p>In Tennessee, where 6,910,840 people live, 14% live in poverty, and 8% live in extreme poverty as of 2023<sup>1</sup>. On average, approximately one in six children live with families with incomes below the official poverty line<sup>2</sup>. The effects of poverty are long-lasting and can cause a range of issues<sup>2</sup>. In children, poverty can lead to inadequate nutrition, developmental delays, poor academic performance, behavioral problems, and increased risks for health issues like asthma and pneumonia<sup>2</sup>.</p>	
	<h4>What is the policy concern?</h4> <p>As of June 2022, only 0.4% of the Tennessee population received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)<sup>3</sup> and received approximately 387 dollars per month<sup>4</sup>. Tennessee has among the lowest TANF cash payments in the nation and yet has a surplus of about 717 million dollars in TANF funds that can easily be used to help those in poverty<sup>5</sup>.</p> <h4>What is the proposed solution?</h4> <p>The proposed solution to address poverty and TANF surplus funds in Tennessee is to advocate for the passage of Tennessee SB 1961/HB 2397, which promotes increasing the base TANF cash assistance to reflect the effect of inflation. This legislation, effective January 1, 2025, would ensure that TANF-eligible families receive financial support that keeps pace with rising costs, thereby helping to alleviate some of the economic pressures faced by low-income households and ultimately improving their overall quality of life.</p>	
	<h4>Who supports this?</h4> <p>Metro Nashville Public Health Department Tennessee Economic Council on Women Children’s Defense Fund - Southern Regional Office Tennessee Association of Community Action (TACA) United Way of Greater Nashville Catholic Charities of East Tennessee Tennessee Education Association (TEA) City of Chattanooga Office of Family Empowerment</p> <h4>Where can I get more information?</h4> <p>Visit our campaign website at <a href="http://www.tanfadvocacylink.com">www.tanfadvocacylink.com</a> or email Savanna Stowell at <a href="mailto:savannagregory@southern.edu">savannagregory@southern.edu</a> for more information.</p>	<h4>What are some experiences?</h4> <p>Jennifer Jenkins, a mother of four, struggled to make ends meet despite working, as TANF’s limited support barely covered rent and food. Similar to Tennessee, Colorado also has low TANF cash payments, making it challenging for families in both states to escape poverty despite the program’s intended support.</p> <p>“If the amount was larger, it would have played a bigger role, because at the time I wasn’t working when I had first found out I was pregnant,” she said. “So that was why I ended up on TANF. But then, once I found out how much I was getting monthly—\$200 for a month. You can’t live on that as an adult.”</p>
	<p><sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). Tennessee: Profile data. <a href="https://data.census.gov/profile/Tennessee?gs=040XX00US47">https://data.census.gov/profile/Tennessee?gs=040XX00US47</a></p> <p><sup>2</sup> American Psychological Association. (2024, May). Poverty, hunger, and homelessness in children. <a href="https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/poverty-hunger-homelessness-children">https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/poverty-hunger-homelessness-children</a></p> <p><sup>3</sup> Shantz, K., Dehry, I., &amp; Knowles, S. (2024, March 29). Tennessee TANF Opportunity Act baseline scan. Urban Institute. <a href="https://www.urban.org/research/publication/tennessee-tanf-opportunity-act-baseline-scan">https://www.urban.org/research/publication/tennessee-tanf-opportunity-act-baseline-scan</a></p> <p><sup>4</sup> Tennessee Department of Human Services. (n.d.). TANF Opportunity Act. <a href="https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/tanf-opportunity-act">https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/tanf-opportunity-act</a></p> <p><sup>5</sup> Wadhvani, A. (2024, January 22). Years after public outcry over unspent funds for needy families, Tennessee has \$717M stockpile. Tennessee Lookout. <a href="https://tennesseelookout.com/2024/01/22/years-after-public-outcry-over-unspent-funds-for-needy-families-tennessee-has-717m-stockpile">https://tennesseelookout.com/2024/01/22/years-after-public-outcry-over-unspent-funds-for-needy-families-tennessee-has-717m-stockpile</a></p>	

## Appendix E

### Policy Brief

# “TANF FOR TOMORROW”

Increasing Tennessee TANF benefits to match inflation.

## THE PROBLEM

In Tennessee, where 6,910,840 people live, 14% live in poverty, and 8% live in extreme poverty as of 2023<sup>1</sup>. On average, approximately one in six children live with families with incomes below the official poverty line<sup>2</sup>. The effects of poverty are long-lasting and can cause a range of issues<sup>2</sup>. In children, poverty can lead to inadequate nutrition, developmental delays, poor academic performance, behavioral problems, and increased risks for health issues like asthma and pneumonia<sup>2</sup>.

## CURRENT POLICY SITUATION & GAPS

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a federal program aimed to help families with children struggling in poverty. To be eligible for TANF in Tennessee, applicants must meet specific requirements, including participating in work-related activities, agreeing to follow a Personal Responsibility Plan (PRP), and developing a family empower plan (FEP), among other conditions<sup>3</sup>. TANF provides benefits such as transportation, childcare assistance, and temporary cash assistance for its beneficiaries<sup>4</sup>.

As of June 2022, only 0.4% of Tennessee's population received TANF<sup>5</sup>, with a maximum monthly benefit of \$387 for a family of three<sup>6</sup>. Tennessee has among the lowest TANF cash payments nationally, despite holding a \$717 million surplus in TANF funds<sup>7</sup>.

This benefit amount is insufficient to meet basic needs. For instance, TANF recipients in Tennessee struggle to afford the cost of living, as the maximum benefit covers only 11% of the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment, which is \$1,080<sup>8</sup>. Federal standards consider housing affordable when it costs no more than 30% of income, but TANF falls far below this threshold<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, options like public housing are often limited in availability and have waiting times of over two years in Tennessee<sup>9</sup>. Without additional income, recipients face significant financial strain, worsening their vulnerability to housing insecurity and other essential needs challenges.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

To address poverty and TANF surplus funds in Tennessee, cash benefits need to be increased to effectively help recipients meet their needs<sup>10</sup>. To achieve this, the passage of Tennessee Senate Bill 1961 (HB 2397) is crucial. This legislation would ensure that TANF-eligible families receive monthly cash benefits that keeps pace with rising costs and reflects the effects of inflation. The base monthly payment amount for TANF-eligible families would increase annually based on changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The increase would reflect the percentage change in the CPI for all items, averaged across cities, between the two most recent calendar years. If the CPI decreases in a given year, the payment amount will remain the same and not be reduced.

Tennessee Senate Bill 1961 (HB2397) was introduced in January 2024 but has since stalled with no further progress in the current legislative cycle. To pass this bill into reality, advocacy efforts are necessary.

## ALTERNATE OPTIONS

### Do Nothing

If no action is taken, the TANF surplus will remain unused, leaving thousands of families in Tennessee without needed support. This missed opportunity means that many vulnerable families will continue to struggle in poverty, even as funds sit idle that could alleviate some of their financial burdens.

### Allocate Funds to Organizations

While directing TANF funds to organizations could support programs focused on employment and self-sufficiency, this approach has significant limitations. Many organizations are not eligible to receive community grants required to offer direct assistance to families, making it a challenging and indirect solution<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, relying on organizations adds unnecessary complexity for families in need, who would have to navigate additional processes to access support<sup>10</sup>. Providing direct cash benefits to families is more straightforward, efficient, and ensures that aid reaches those in need.

### Expand TANF Eligibility

Expanding TANF eligibility would increase spending on assistance, but it could also heighten reliance on government aid, which goes against TANF's goal of being a temporary solution. While more families would receive support, this approach does not address the root causes of poverty or help families achieve long-term stability.

## RECOMMENDED OPTION

### Direct TANF Cash Benefits

Direct cash benefits that reflect inflation rates are the most effective way to utilize TANF funds to help families escape poverty<sup>10</sup>. By giving cash directly to families, the funds provide immediate, flexible support, allowing recipients to address their most pressing needs—whether it be housing, food, or other essentials. Direct cash assistance empowers families with financial control and reduces the need for complicated, time-consuming processes. This approach maximizes the impact of TANF funds, delivering help where it's needed most and supporting families in building a more stable, self-sufficient future. This approach is also cost-effective, as it leverages the existing surplus of hundreds of millions of dollars in TANF funds<sup>7</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Directing Tennessee's TANF surplus as cash benefits provides immediate, flexible support to families in need, offering a straightforward solution to use TANF surplus funds to reduce poverty and promote financial stability.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). Tennessee: Profile data. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/profile/Tennessee?g=040XX00U47>

<sup>2</sup> American Psychological Association. (2024, May). Poverty, hunger, and homelessness in children. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/poverty-hunger-homelessness-children>

<sup>3</sup> Tennessee Department of Human Services. (n.d.). Families First eligibility information. Retrieved from <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/families-first-tanf/families-first-eligibility-information.html>

<sup>4</sup> Tennessee Department of Human Services. (n.d.). Families First (TANF). Retrieved from <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/families-first-tanf.html>

<sup>5</sup> Shantz, K., Doherty, I., & Knowles, S. (2024, March 29). Tennessee TANF Opportunity Act baseline scan. Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/tennessee-tanf-opportunity-act-baseline-scan>

<sup>6</sup> Tennessee Department of Human Services. (n.d.). TANF Opportunity Act. Retrieved from <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/tanf-opportunity-act>

<sup>7</sup> Wadhvani, A. (2024, January 22). Years after public outcry over unspent funds for needy families, Tennessee has \$717M stockpile. Tennessee Lookout. Retrieved from <https://tennesseelookout.com/2024/01/22/years-after-public-outcry-over-unspent-funds-for-needy-families-tennessee-has-717m-stockpile>

<sup>8</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2023, February 21). Cash assistance should reach millions more families. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/cash-assistance-should-reach-millions-more-families>

<sup>9</sup> USAFacts. (n.d.). How long do people wait for subsidized housing? Tennessee. Retrieved from <https://usafacts.org/answers/how-long-do-people-wait-for-subsidized-housing/state/tennessee/>

<sup>10</sup> Hahn, H., Trisi, D., & Kenney, G. M. (2023, January). Strategies for improving public benefits access and retention. Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/Strategies%20for%20Improving%20Public%20Benefits%20Access%20and%20Retention.pdf>