

TANF for Tomorrow

A Policy and Advocacy Action Plan

Savanna Stowell, Bertina Hibbert, Brooke Holloway, Chataqua Yardley

Southern Adventist University

SOCW-609: Advanced Social Policy

Dr. Nina Nelson

December 11, 2024

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Abstract

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; they play a critical role in determining eligibility for federal and state assistance programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF is designed to provide financial aid to families in need 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, July 2).

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 plays a critical role in addressing 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, many families struggle to access TANF benefits due to administrative hurdles, lack of awareness, and difficulties in navigating the system (Tennessee Department of Human Services, 2023). 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 without a specific deadline for spending the funds, Tennessee has accumulated a significant surplus. 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, which is 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; Wadhvani, 2024).

In addition to cash assistance, Tennessee allocates TANF funds to community organizations offering services such as childcare, transportation, and job training. However, a 2019 report by the Beacon Center 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 at that time. 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 (Wadhvani, 2024).

Proposed Solution

The proposed solution is the reintroduction and passage of 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 change would enhance the program's effectiveness and ensure that it fulfills its goal of supporting Tennessee's most vulnerable families in a more direct and impactful way (TrackBill, n.d.).

Proposed Policy Change

This policy plan advocates for the revival of SB 1961/HB 2397 to increase TANF base payments by indexing them to inflation. The adjustment, beginning January 1, 2025, would help ensure that the payments keep pace with the rising cost of living, providing more substantial support for low-income families. By doing so, the state would better utilize its TANF funds and improve the financial stability of thousands of families in need.

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

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 families in Tennessee who are TANF-eligible, including approximately 29,000 Tennesseans, of whom over 23,000 are children. These families would receive more substantial and consistent financial support (Kelman, 2024). Implementing agencies: The Tennessee Department of Human Services and other state agencies will need to 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).

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 (Wadhvani, 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 a necessary step toward 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 areas of the state budget (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

Discuss the importance of addressing this issue. (Chataqua A1 Box 3)

(As applicable, statements are supported with empirical evidence and recent statistics)

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 definition, 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 at hand. 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. In this campaign, the primary objective is to provide consistent financial support to low-income families through an inflation-based adjustment to TANF payments. This goal will be measured by changes in poverty rates, 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 will require clear legislative language and a public awareness campaign to communicate the bill's benefits. 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, ensuring 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 and 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 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, which aimed 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 families in need 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

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 the basic needs of families 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 that is 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 (New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, 2023).

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, 2023).

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). 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, due to low benefit levels, many families struggle to meet essential needs such as housing, food, and healthcare, 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). Geographic disparities in service delivery can lead to significant barriers in 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 rates of unemployment 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 are often more reliant 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 in 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 established partnerships 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). Efforts to inform families about TANF benefits also differ across the state; while some regions implement robust outreach programs, others fall short, leaving many families unaware of their eligibility or the services available to them (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 overall effectiveness of the program 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 branding of the campaign, “Empower Families: Bridging the TANF Gap in Tennessee,” is designed to evoke feelings of hope, support, and action. The title encapsulates the dual focus of the campaign: 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 the goal of providing not just financial assistance but also the tools, resources, and support systems necessary for families to achieve self-sufficiency (Green, 2021). By 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 attention on the specific issue at hand—the insufficiency of benefits, the accumulation of unspent funds, and the barriers that 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).

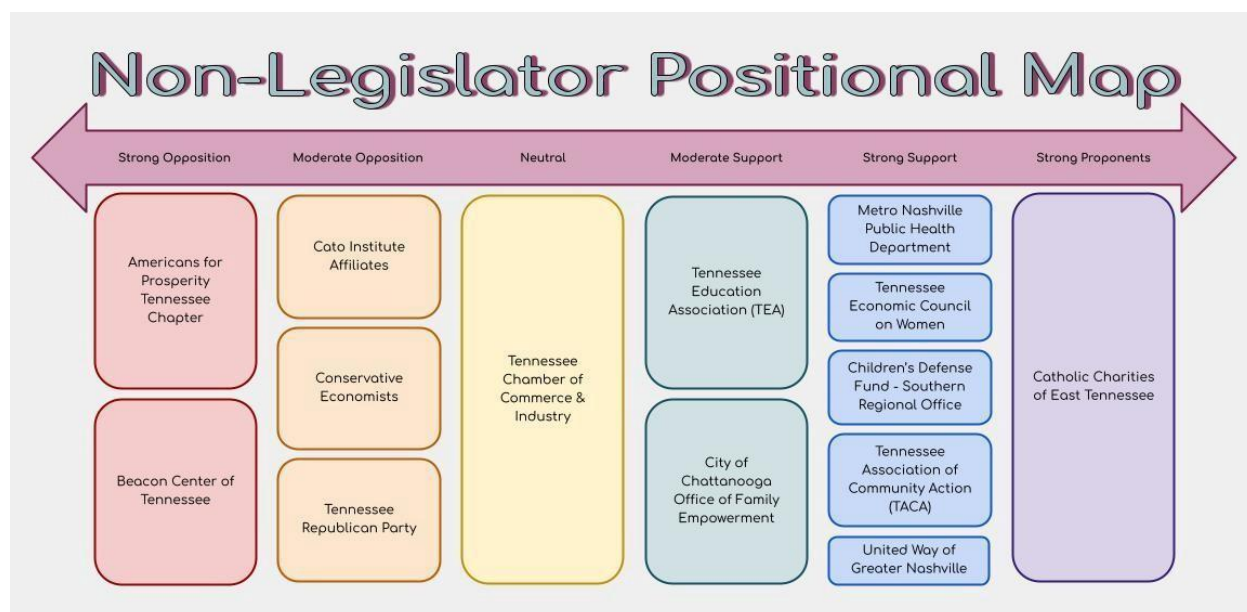
The campaign's branding strategically frames the issue of TANF in a way that emphasizes both the challenges and the potential for positive change. By highlighting empowerment and the need to bridge gaps, the campaign shifts the narrative from one of victimhood to one of agency and collective responsibility (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 not just as individuals needing help, but as 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



Persuasive Arguments for Support

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

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 not just as a social issue but as 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.

Impact: By demonstrating that investing in families can lead to increased economic activity, potential supporters may see TANF reform as a sound financial decision, making it easier for them to align with the advocacy plan.

Reduction of Long-Term Costs

Supporting families in poverty can reduce long-term costs associated with social services, healthcare, and the criminal justice system. When families have sufficient resources, they 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).

Impact: 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 rates of crime, better health outcomes, and more cohesive social structures. Supporting vulnerable populations is not only a moral responsibility but also a pathway to a healthier, more equitable society.

Impact: 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 has had positive impacts in other states, demonstrating the feasibility and effectiveness of such reforms. For example, in Washington State, where TANF benefits were increased by 15%, studies found a decrease in child poverty rates and an improvement in 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 lead to improved family outcomes and enhanced community well-being.

Impact: Concrete examples of successful implementation can build confidence in the advocacy plan, making it more appealing to supporters who are 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.

Impact: This argument appeals to those who are concerned about the future of Tennessee's children 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 in support of the advocacy plan for TANF reform in Tennessee.

Legislative Allies and Detractors

Discuss the legislative allies and detractors map (include it here, or as an appendix). (Chataqua A3 box 4)

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 the work ethic and independence of recipients. 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 when combined with employment programs and job training, increased benefits do not significantly reduce employment motivation (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, which could result 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). Additionally, studies from other states that have increased TANF payments without resulting in negative fiscal outcomes may serve to counterbalance concerns about overextending budgets (Harris & Baker, 2022).

Administrative Challenges and Implementation

A common concern expressed by critics involves 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 might 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).

By focusing on streamlining administrative processes and reducing barriers to benefit access, these changes are designed to improve efficiency rather than create additional complexity. 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, we can refine the advocacy plan for TANF reform in Tennessee. Engaging with concerns about dependency, fiscal responsibility, and administrative challenges allows for the development of well-supported counterarguments and 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

Discuss potential coalition members that would help with your advocacy campaign. State at least 4-5 logical partners that would be coalition members that will help your advocacy campaign. Explain why you selected each and would each coalition member's role in your advocacy campaign? State at least 1-2 "odd bedfellows" that would be coalition members that will help your advocacy campaign? Explain why you selected each odd bedfellows and would each of these coalition member's role in your advocacy campaign? (Bertina A3 box 6)

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. To build an effective coalition for advocating this amendment, a combination of logical partners and unexpected allies is essential. This diverse coalition will enable the campaign to appeal to a broader range of stakeholders with varied interests, thereby strengthening support for the proposed policy change. In this coalition, there are logical partners and odd bedfellows 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 to persuade policymakers of the importance of this reform. Their involvement will reinforce the credibility of the campaign 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 due to its focus 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.

Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope (MICAH)

MICAH's commitment to economic and social justice 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. Additionally, MICAH can organize community events to engage citizens, creating a narrative that highlights poverty alleviation as both 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 campaign for SB 1961/HB 2397 due to the link between poverty reduction and lower crime rates. Research by Rosenfeld, Fornango, and Rengifo (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 both 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 base of support for the campaign.

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 both 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. Together, 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 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 success of the campaign and the eventual legislative change.

Policymakers

Target Audience. State legislators, particularly those involved in budgeting and social services, including members of the Tennessee General Assembly, as well as the Governor's Office.

Desired Action. 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

Target Audience. Individuals and families currently receiving TANF benefits or those eligible for assistance in Tennessee.

Desired Action. 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.

Community Organizations

Target Audience. Local nonprofits, advocacy groups, and faith-based organizations focused on poverty alleviation, social services, and family welfare in Tennessee.

Desired Action. 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

Target Audience. Tennessee residents, especially those who may not be directly affected by TANF but are invested in social justice, economic stability, and poverty reduction.

Desired Action. 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.

By targeting these key audiences, the advocacy campaign aims to build a coalition of support for TANF reforms. 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

Describe the media you plan to use and the content of each message as appropriate for that media approach. (Chataqua A4 Box 2)

Media Content

In your appendix include the messaging materials. (Bertina A4 box 3) (savanna add policy brief here?)

About the Campaign

The purpose of the campaign supporting SB 1961/HB 2397 is to advocate for adjustments to Tennessee's TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) payments in response to inflation. The campaign highlights the impact that rising costs of living have 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. This adjustment, starting on January 1, 2025, 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 SB 1961/HB 2397 for TANF-Eligible Families

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 contributing to the stabilization of regional economies.

Highlighted Benefits of SB 1961/HB 2397

The passage of SB 1961/HB 2397, which ties TANF benefits to inflation, promises significant benefits for Tennessee's low-income families. By adjusting payments in line with rising costs, the bill 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 (Tennessee Lookout, 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 (Tennessee Lookout, 2024). In this way, the bill not only helps vulnerable families but also contributes to the overall economic stability of communities across Tennessee.

Invitation to Join the Coalition

Joining our coalition is simple, and your support can make a significant difference in advocating for SB 1961/HB 2397. Here's how you can get involved; start by entering your email address to receive regular campaign updates, action alerts, and event notifications. We are proud to collaborate with a network of organizations dedicated to securing economic support for Tennessee families. Our 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 (Vera Institute), and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (Agricultural Enterprise Fund).

You can also participate in advocacy actions by contacting legislators using your zip code to send a pre-written email or personally reaching 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 we advocate 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 where legislators stand 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 up to date 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 gain a comprehensive understanding of 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, along with insights into the program's payment limitations. Additionally, 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 are struggling to afford necessities, which affects 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 am a resident of [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 (Facebook/Twitter/Instagram)

Content. Our social media pages feature informative posts that explain the significance of TANF and highlight the challenges inflation poses for low-income families. We include shareable graphics that illustrate how the proposed policy adjustments benefit both families and the local economy. Additionally, we share real-life testimonials and quotes from coalition partners who endorse the policy change, providing a personal and relatable perspective.

Links. 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 aim to 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, keeping the public and media informed about progress. Flyers summarizing the campaign's significance, objectives, and ways for community members to get involved will also be distributed.

At community events, handouts such as brochures 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.

See Appendix E for campaign flyer.

Implementation Steps

Campaign Media Strategies and Non-Media Activities Implementation Plan

The following is a detailed timeline for the implementation of 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.

1. 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 social media pages on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Ensure that the website has sections for updates, advocacy actions, and resource materials.

Responsible Party. Web and Social Media Team

2. 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

3. 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 express their support for 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 how to advocate for SB 1961/HB 2397 and inform volunteers about talking points for interacting with the public and legislators.

Responsible Party. Volunteer Coordination Team

4. 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

5. 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 who are 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

6. Post-Campaign Phase (June 2025)

Description.**Step 11: Campaign Evaluation and Reporting*****Date.*** June 1–10, 2025

Evaluate the success of the campaign, 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**

Identify your focus and target and intended consumers/beneficiaries. (Bertina A5 box 2)

SB 1961/HB 2397 seeks to support Tennessee's low-income families by adjusting TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) payments to reflect 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 play a crucial role in guiding the policy through participation in advisory committees, needs assessments, and advocacy efforts. By sharing their experiences with challenges such as childcare costs and housing instability, they will help shape the policy to better meet

Description.

their needs. 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 and Human Services, 2023).

Extended family members and legal guardians, such as grandparents and other kin, will be actively involved in policy advocacy 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. To support their involvement, tailored services will be provided, 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 that 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, will be actively involved in every phase of the campaign for SB 1961/HB 2397. 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

Discuss effective advocacy strategies applicable in this case. (Savanna A5 Box 1)

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 have the power to 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

Describe your plans to include the consumers/beneficiaries in your advocacy efforts, and 4-5 each positive and negative the ramifications of doing so. (Bertina A5 box 3)

While involving consumers and beneficiaries in policy advocacy can offer some positive outcomes, it also presents significant negative impacts that can undermine the effectiveness of the program. 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 not only affects the individuals involved but can also hinder the overall success of the program, 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 is not truly reflective of 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 integrity of the program. 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 lead to the exclusion of 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 they aim 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 to 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 is mainly revolving around the TANF, this would belong to Cherrell Campbell-Street, the Deputy Commissioner 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

As we prepare to advocate for necessary reforms to Tennessee's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, it is critical to present clear and compelling arguments. 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 (Smith, 2023). This surplus represents an opportunity to enhance benefits without placing additional strain on 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, leading to reductions in child poverty and improved family stability (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 [CBPP], 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. By addressing these inequities, 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 closely 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, 2023). 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

Throughout the legislative process, consistent communication with stakeholders, including advocacy groups like the United Way and the Tennessee Economic Council on Women, will be maintained. 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 (National Low Income Housing Coalition [NLIHC], 2023).

Implementation Monitoring

After the bill's passage, monitoring its implementation is critical to ensure fidelity to the legislation's intent. A task force composed of policymakers, social workers, and representatives from advocacy organizations will be established to oversee the rollout. Metrics such as the timeliness of benefit adjustments, the number of families served, and satisfaction levels among recipients will be tracked quarterly (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [CBPP], 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. This feedback will be shared with legislators to propose further refinements or expansions if needed (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.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Positional maps, if not included in the paper

Appendix B: Educational materials- Fact Sheet and Policy brief

Appendix C: Media campaign materials/messaging attachments (if not included in the paper)

Appendix D: Any evidences of implementation of the steps

Appendix E: Any other supporting document you are referencing in your paper)

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

Contact Info:

Social media:

#SUPPORTTANFADJUSTMENT

Support Tennessee Families: Adjust TANF Payments for Inflation.

Find us online @ www.TNfamilysupport.org

#SUPPORTTANFADJUSTMENT

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...
 -

