

## **Legislative Outreach Letter (Course Evidence)**

### **SOCW 609 – Advanced Policy**

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Reform – Tennessee

#### **Document Notes (for portfolio upload)**

- This is a course-based legislative outreach letter aligned with Competency 5.1 (Policy Practice).
- Replace bracketed sections with accurate names/titles and update bill details as needed.
- Keep the content de-identified if required (no private client information).

[Your Name], MSW Candidate

Southern Adventist University – SOCW 609 Advanced Policy

[City, State]

[Email] | [Phone]

[Date]

[The Honorable First Last]

[Tennessee House of Representatives / Tennessee Senate]

[Office Address]

Nashville, TN [ZIP]

RE: Support for Reintroduction of HB 0137 / SB 0144 with Amendment to Improve County-Level TANF Access and Accountability

Dear [Representative/Senator] [Last Name]:

I am writing as part of my graduate policy practice coursework (SOCW 609 – Advanced Policy) to share concerns about barriers to access and accountability in Tennessee’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program (Families First) and to respectfully request your support for reintroducing HB 0137 / SB 0144 with a targeted amendment to strengthen county-level implementation.

TANF is designed to provide short-term financial support and related services to eligible families while promoting stability and self-sufficiency. However, public reporting and policy analysis have raised concerns that Tennessee maintains a large balance of unspent TANF funds while a relatively small share of families experiencing poverty receive cash assistance and related supports. When access is inconsistent or confusing, families may go without basic stability supports—contributing to food insecurity, housing instability, and avoidable crises that increase strain on other public systems.

HB 0137 / SB 0144 outlines several accountability and distribution mechanisms, including an annual report and county proportional allotments of unspent funds. Our

proposed amendment strengthens the county allotment section by establishing Direct Access Teams (DATs) to support implementation and oversight. DATs would serve as liaisons between the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) and county-level providers (nonprofits and local agencies) by helping ensure timely, transparent, and consistent allocation of funds to qualified organizations delivering evidence-based supports.

### **Proposed Direct Access Teams (DATs) – Summary**

- Provide county-level coordination to support consistent communication between TDHS and local providers.
- Review and support provider proposals for eligibility and readiness to deliver evidence-based services.
- Track county-level allocation activity and document challenges (e.g., lack of qualifying providers, access barriers).
- Increase transparency through standardized, county-level reporting and technical assistance.
- Reduce preventable underutilization by helping counties maintain adequate qualified provider capacity.

This approach does not create a new entitlement; rather, it strengthens accountability and practical implementation so that existing federal TANF resources are used effectively for their intended purposes. Improved oversight and county-level support can help ensure that eligible families have clearer pathways to services and that TANF dollars are directed toward evidence-based interventions that promote stability.

I respectfully request that you consider sponsoring or supporting the reintroduction of HB 0137 / SB 0144 and reviewing the proposed DAT amendment as a feasible method to strengthen program integrity, reduce access barriers, and improve outcomes for Tennessee families.

Thank you for your time and for your service. If helpful, I can provide a one-page brief summarizing the proposed amendment and implementation considerations.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

MSW Candidate, Southern Adventist University

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