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Blagojevich Administration Announces Boost in Temporary Assistance Benefits for Low-Income Families



MONDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2008 23:25 ADMINISTRATOR

First Increase in Six Years will Give Needy (TANF) Families a Nine Percent Hike



CHICAGO – Low income families finding it hard to make ends meet got some good news today when the Blagojevich Administration announced a nine-percent increase in the benefit amount for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF provides temporary financial assistance for pregnant women and families with one or more dependent children.

The increase in the TANF benefit amount was announced today by Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Secretary Carol L. Adams, Ph.D. at a press conference at the IDHS Family Community Resource Center in Wicker Park.

“The grant increase could not have come at a better time as many families are feeling the pinch of the struggling economy,” said Governor Rod R. Blagojevich. “The extra monthly amount will help families deal with the rising cost of living.”

TANF helps individuals and families achieve self-sufficiency by providing financial assistance to help pay for food, shelter, utilities, and expenses other than medical costs. There are 26,675 TANF households in Illinois totaling 62,117 persons. The increase in the TANF payment levels will be included in the November payments. Each family receiving TANF will also receive a retroactive lump sum payment for July through October. The retroactive payment is issued to the recipient's Link card account.

“This is a great day for Illinois because of what the TANF increase means to so many Illinoisans trying to provide for their families and move toward self-sufficiency,” Adams said. “The TANF program offers important temporary assistance to those families who need it the most and the long-awaited increase will make a big difference for more than 26,000 families.”

With the increase, a family of four living in Chicago will now receive \$474 a month. Families in medium and small cities receive slightly less. The most recent previous TANF increase was a five percent hike in 2002.

The average monthly TANF grant is \$241. The average length of time a customer receives TANF is 19.3 months.

“If families can't pay the bills, they can't focus on workforce participation.

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We're very pleased that the Governor and General Assembly took this step to allow the lowest income children and families to meet their ever-increasing needs," said John Bouman, president of the Shriver Center.

The TANF program offers time-limited cash assistance for basic needs, such as clothing, housing, and utilities. A person or family who gets TANF also receives medical assistance and food stamps to help them work toward self-sufficiency. The program also provides self-sufficiency services to help families become independent, such as GED preparation, vocational training, postsecondary education, vocational rehabilitation, classes in basic English, help with child care, work stipends, and job retention services.

To qualify for TANF, a person must:

- Be pregnant or have a child under age 19 who lives with them. A child who is 18 must be a full-time high school student. A pregnant woman (and her husband, if he lives with her) may qualify for help, even if they don't have any other children.
- Live in Illinois. A person can be homeless and still qualify.
- Have countable income less than the TANF Payment Level for their family size.
- Be a U.S. citizen or meet certain immigration requirements.
- Develop and follow a plan for becoming self-sufficient.

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