

## **TANF Changes Effective July 1**

House Bill 1800, signed into law by Gov. Pat Quinn on January 21 and effective July 1, changes Illinois's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program such that low-income Illinoisans' access to benefits will increase and survivors of domestic and sexual violence can receive more easily TANF and Crisis Assistance benefits. TANF provides a much-needed safety net in the form of cash assistance and transitional services for families with dependent children and for pregnant women so that they can meet basic expenses such as rent, utilities, clothing, transportation, and other expenses.

Chief among the provisions of this new law is that all earned income (from employment and self-employment) below 50 percent of the federal poverty level will not be counted at the time of application. Many more low-wage workers will be income-eligible for TANF as a result. At present 50 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of three is \$762.92 per month, or \$9,155 per year. Before July 1, families earning as little as 30 percent of the federal poverty level (\$508.61 per month, or \$6,103 per year for a family of three) were not income-eligible for TANF. For the 680,000 Illinoisans [living in deep poverty](#), many of whom are children, this expanded access to cash assistance is a critical lifeline.

Other measures aimed at increasing access to TANF and improving efficiency for poor and vulnerable children and families are

- requiring benefits to be paid within 30 days of the date of application instead of 45 days;
- making benefits payable from the date of application rather than 30 days after application;
- allowing applicants 30 days after their application before they are required to participate in work-related activities; and
- disregarding—once an application is approved—three-fourths instead of two-thirds of a recipient's earned income; this encourages employment and keeps eligible for limited assistance those families with earned income until they reach the federal poverty level.

### TANF for Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence

A challenge for survivors of domestic or sexual violence is securing and maintaining TANF benefits. The safety and recovery needs of these survivors may be jeopardized by TANF requirements, such as cooperating with child support enforcement, participating in work activities, and the 60-month time limit on receiving benefits. Through the Family Violence

Option (FVO), previously known in Illinois as the Domestic Violence Exclusion and now named the Family Violence Exclusion, any program requirement may be waived when compliance would make it more difficult to escape the violence, when compliance would put an individual at further risk of violence, or when compliance would unfairly penalize an individual who is or has been victimized. The FVO waivers are available when applying for benefits, while receiving benefits, and after expiration of the 60-month time limit on receiving benefits. H.B. 1800 extends the FVO to survivors of sexual violence as well.

The new law also expands access to the Crisis Assistance program for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. As of July 1, Crisis Assistance may be granted when

- a family becomes homeless because family members have left their residence due to domestic or sexual violence (whether or not the perpetrator lived with the survivor), or
- a family has been deprived of the household's income as a result of domestic or sexual violence (either the perpetrator's income or a family member's income).

Currently FVO waivers are initially given for only two months, regardless of the survivors' circumstances, and must be renewed thereafter on a monthly basis. Changes in TANF allow eligibility for an FVO waiver to be up to six months in duration before requiring a redetermination. The law also defines domestic and sexual violence as including stalking, such as stalking through electronic communications.

View the full text of the new law [here](#).

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