



820 First Street NE ■ Suite 510 ■ Washington DC 20002
(202)408-1080 ■ fax (202)408-1056 ■ center@cbpp.org ■ www.cbpp.org

February 24, 2015

Erinn Kelley-Siel, Director
Oregon Department of Human Services
500 Summer St. NE, E15
Salem, OR 97301-1097

Dear Ms. Kelley-Siel,

Thank you for sharing the Department's TANF Reinvestment Proposal and asking for our feedback. We support the choices that the Department made in this proposal, as detailed below.

In the recent recession and its aftermath, Oregon commendably maintained a cash assistance safety net for children and families, to a greater extent than many states. Because of resource constraints, however, the state made some hard choices, including reducing spending in its welfare-to-work programs. Now is the time to reinvest and redouble efforts to connect very needy families to employment and skills training, as well as to strengthen the safety net and increase efforts to support successful transitions to work.

The TANF Reinvestment Proposal furthers a number of the principles that we believe are key elements of TANF programs that simultaneously promote economic opportunity and provide a safety net for needy families. (A full list of these principles developed by CBPP is attached.) Here are a few of the specific ways in which we believe the proposal supports these principles:

- Increasing investments in outcome-focused case management services and expansion of contracts with community-based organizations that focus on family stabilization recognizes the individual and diverse needs of the TANF caseload and supports multiple pathways to work.
- Focusing on families reaching time limits on cash assistance recognizes that these families are among the most vulnerable, with the greatest barriers to employment, and in particular need of focused case-management services.
- Providing support services including transportation, childcare, or housing assistance will help families remain stably employed and support successful exits from cash assistance. Transitional supports in this proposal that will help families as they transition to work include reduced child care cost-sharing and transitional cash and food aid.

- Increasing the level of earnings at which a family loses eligibility for public assistance will help stabilize families in low-paying jobs as they move from welfare to work. Oregon has among the weakest “make work pay” policies in the nation and addressing the benefit cliff that a family faces even with a part-time job is a key and overdue work support improvement.
- Program simplification will strengthening the cash assistance safety net and thus family stability.

We appreciate that you only have a limited amount of funding here so these proposals do not go as far as we would ideally propose in providing a stronger cash assistance safety net and improving employment-related programs. Nonetheless, we believe you have made informed choices that will both support families who are able to find work and those who face significant employment barriers. We would be pleased to continue to work with you and your staff as you implement this Reinvestment Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth LaDonna". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a faint, light-colored rectangular stamp or watermark.

Liz Schott
Senior Fellow
Family Income Support

LaDonna Pavetti
Vice President for Family Income Support

Principles for TANF programs that promote economic opportunity and provide a safety net for needy families

- TANF has key twin equally important roles: providing a cash assistance safety net and preparing and connecting parents to employment.
- Recognizing the importance of stability for children's positive growth and development, TANF provides sufficient income to support children's success in school and future success in the labor market.
- Time limits do not deny families aid when they are unable to work because of individual circumstances or economic conditions.
- Assistance does not immediately end when a parent finds a job; higher eligibility exit levels and transitional supports are important for long-term economic success and family stability.
- Recognizing the diversity of the caseload, TANF supports multiple pathways to work.
- Individual expectations are realistic, taking into account strengths, goals and employment barriers.
- Participants receive employment-related assistance that has a reasonable chance of *improving* their economic prospects.
- Participants are offered a chance to participate in a diverse array of education and training programs that will prepare them for higher-paying and more stable jobs. Participants are provided with support services such as child care and transportation assistance to boost their chances of success.
- TANF recipients have access to the same education and training opportunities as others with similar backgrounds and needs.
- The program is flexible enough to adapt to changes in and respond to the realities of local labor markets.