



To: House Committee on Human Services and Housing
From: Matt Newell-Ching, Public Affairs Director
Subject: Statement of support for improvements to TANF (HB 3183)
Date: April 3, 2019

We envision an Oregon where everyone is healthy, hunger-free and thriving.

Yet one in eight families in Oregon experiences hunger or food insecurity - the highest rate in the Northwest United States. The "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families" (TANF) program assists Oregonians experiencing deep poverty and who have exhausted family resources. Families often face crises such as losing a job or escaping domestic violence. This support through TANF is meaningful but insufficient - support has eroded for over 20 years because of an outdated federal funding structure.

HB 3183—Addressing Barriers Facing Families on TANF

Hunger-Free Oregon supports the work of the bipartisan TANF workgroup that led to HB 3183. The bill as amended would use existing resources to make targeted investments to better assist families to get out of crisis and stay out of crisis. Specifically, we support the following investments as part of HB 3183:

Housing Stability

Often the biggest need for families participating in TANF is a safe, affordable place to call home. The Housing Stability Program works in coordination with OHCS helps serve the parents who need a chance to stabilize their lives and to protect their children from more expensive services in the future. Investing in the Housing Stability Program will connect more families in need of stable housing.

Mental Health Providers for TANF Families

Across the state, access to behavioral health services is a barrier for families in poverty. A lack of providers or availability keeps families from getting the care they need, when they need it. Adding mental health professionals at DHS points of service will support families facing barriers.

Expand Education and Training Opportunities

One of the primary goals of TANF is to provide job training and skills to families. The success of the REACH program in Southern Oregon demonstrated that wrap-around supports and relevant short-term training, vocational training, and adult basic education lead to opportunities. Additional investments in REACH will help more Oregonians transition off services into family-wage jobs while supporting families on a path towards career advancement.

Support for families after leaving TANF

When a family leaves the TANF program, a single unexpected expense - such as an unexpected medical bill or a broken down car - can spiral into a crisis. A post-TANF flexible fund that can help with such costs is a smart investment that can give families the ability to continue to work and prevent families from needing to seek TANF again after leaving the program.