



April 12th, 2022

To the members of House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services,

On behalf of Children's Hospital Colorado, we are writing today to urge your support of HB22-1259 to update the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, also known as Colorado Works. The improvements made to TANF through HB22-1259 represent a targeted approach that Colorado can take to reduce extreme childhood poverty which can have a lifelong impact.

Children's Hospital Colorado is proud to partner with the community to advocate for the health and well-being of kids and families. Our work goes beyond our hospital walls and into the communities we support. In addition to our patient care, Children's Hospital Colorado supports families by providing care coordination, advocacy and facilitating access to community programs and resources.

As you may know, families enrolled in TANF are eligible to receive basic cash assistance to help pay for basic needs, such as diapers, nutritious food, bus passes, rent, utilities and school supplies. A 2019 report on reducing child poverty concluded that income support for families experiencing poverty can improve children's health and academic achievement, which in turn can lead to better health and higher earnings in adulthood.^[1]

Economic security programs can blunt the negative effects of poverty and bring low-income children closer to equal opportunity. Research also indicates that economic security programs not only open doors of opportunity for participating low-income children but also lift their future health, productivity, and ability to contribute to their communities and the economy.^[2]

One of the main problems though is that basic cash assistance payments through TANF have not kept up with inflation or the high cost of living in Colorado. Basic cash assistance payments are actually worth less than the payments were at the start of the TANF program in 1996 - currently the basic cash assistance payments are \$508 per month for a family of three. In order for TANF to help families achieve economic security, Colorado should increase TANF payments to keep up with the rising cost of living and ensure the program adequately serves its families, which HB22-1259 seeks to do.

The TANF program can also be difficult for parents to navigate, and families can be better supported by addressing policies like the "cliff effect," and work requirements. The work requirements of the program can also be more responsive to family needs and should be eased when families are facing uniquely challenging circumstances, including a family member being hospitalized or taking care of a newborn. HB22-1259 will work to reduce the "cliff effect" that will help families stay employed and promote a smoother off-ramp towards long-term economic security.

Lastly, HB22-1259 recognizes that more can be done related to equitable outreach and engagement with eligible families, including communication in multiple languages and direct engagement with enrolled families during decision-making processes.

In closing, Children's Hospital Colorado urges your support for HB22-1259. If passed, we believe the law will have a positive impact in helping Colorado children and families meet their most basic needs in life and foster healthier futures.

Sincerely,

Zach Zaslow
Director of Government Affairs and Medicaid Strategy
Children's Hospital Colorado

1. National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, "The Consequences of Child Poverty," *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK547371/>.

2. Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, "The Long Reach of Early Childhood Poverty," *Pathways*, Winter 2011, http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/_media/pdf/pathways/winter_2011/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf.



Founded in 1991, the AFDC Coalition is a network to educate, strategize, lobby, support and to inform all Coalition members regarding issues which impact low-income families. We promote public policy to improve the lives of all Coloradans living in poverty.

March 8, 2022

Dear House Public Benefit and Health Committee Members:

The All Families Deserve a Chance (AFDC) Coalition urges you to vote yes on HB22-1259: Modifications to the Colorado Works Program.

As you can tell by our name, we have had long interest in how struggling families can gain economic stability, care for their families, and find economic opportunities that fit them and their plans moving forward. Congress created the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program in 1996, funded it through a block grant which has lost over 30% of its value since then and built in a number of federal restrictions that limit how well Colorado can serve families. Colorado's implementation legislation in 1997 created the Colorado Works Program, which requires 30 hours per week of activities (20 for those with young children), and compliance with an agreed contract. At its best, Colorado Works can provide guidance and structure and skills to parents help them find employment and move ahead. But many who try the program leave not for steady employment, but intermittent jobs or continued deep poverty. For a young parent to survive on \$400 per month for her and her child makes basic survival a full-time task. This is reflected in the drop off of caseload numbers even in recessions.

This bill improves a number of elements of the Colorado Works Program:

1. It phases in an increase in the monthly grant, which currently stands at 28% of the federal poverty level. Meeting basic needs on one's own takes far more than 28% of the federal poverty level, especially in Colorado.
2. It reduces the catastrophic effect of a first sanction. Reducing a parent's meager \$400 /month check by 25% for missing an appointment or other obligation can mean the loss of a roof over her head.
3. It adds an outreach plan so that families in great need, whether fleeing domestic violence or dealing with a job loss or an ill child needing more care, know this modest safety net exists.
4. It adds the expectation that those who apply for, or are participants in, the program have information about the resources and supports that are



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- available through TANF and are aware of TANF decision making processes and policy development.
5. The bill also requires an attempt to contact participants as they leave TANF to interview them about their experience, success, and recommendations about the TANF program, so that such feedback can be used to improve the program in the future.

In conclusion, we hope you will champion prioritizing low-income Colorado families. Your vote can help both the parent and the child, by helping Colorado Works provide the foundation to help launch a new beginning for a parent and better health, and educational outcomes, for the child which income can provide.

If you have any questions, please contact Bonnie DeHart of AFDC Coalition, at afdccoalition@gmail.com

Respectfully,

The AFDC Coalition

House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services
 04/12/2022 01:30 PM
 HB22-1259 Modifications To Colorado Works Program
 Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Saluja Siwakoti For Colorado Coalition for the Homeless</p>	<p>Dear Members of House Judiciary Committee:</p> <p>The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (the Coalition) is in strong support of HB22-1259 to provide financial support to families facing extreme poverty through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Colorado Works program. For nearly 40 years, the Coalition has worked collaboratively toward the prevention of homelessness and creation of lasting solutions for families, children, and individuals in Colorado at risk of experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and skyrocketing housing costs, more and more families with children are being pushed towards poverty and consequentially homelessness. Roughly 3 in 10 Colorado kids live in a household that are housing cost burdened, forcing impossible decisions between rent, food, healthcare, and other necessities. TANF is an essential lifeline for families experiencing homelessness to meet their basic needs. HB22-1259 makes critical improvements to TANF for Colorado families after nearly 15 years of the TANF statute not being updated. The bill will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dramatically increase basic cash assistance, helping bring them out of extreme poverty; - Make improvements to how TANF serves families by reducing barriers to access; - Reduce the “cliff effect” and allow a smoother off-ramp to economic security; and - Improve engagement and outreach with families. <p>The Coalition is optimistic that basic cash assistance is the most targeted approach Colorado can take to reduce extreme poverty which will not only prevent homelessness but also bring lifelong positive impacts in the well-being of families and children. We urge you to act today and VOTE YES on HB22-1259</p>



In Support of HB22-1259 “Modifications to Colorado Works Program”

Esteemed members of the House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee:

My name is Joël McClurg, with the [Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger](#). The Blueprint is a collective impact organization composed of stakeholders and community members focused on alleviating hunger. The Blueprint convenes a collective Policy Committee that has voted in support of HB22-1259 for “Modifications to the Colorado Works Program”.

As an organization focused on helping Colorado families with low or no incomes, there is a lot to like in this bill: increases to Colorado Works Basic Cash Assistance that better keeps up with the rapidly increasing cost of living in our state, reducing the ‘cliff effect’ for economic security programming, improving engagement and outreach with participating families, and streamlining the program to be increasingly responsive to the needs of Coloradans and expand its impact for the households who participate.

In particular, I would like to speak to the streamlining in Section 3 (2)(c) that adds a simplified income conversion to statute. Currently, most economic security programs in Colorado use a confusing conversion that multiplies weekly income by 4.3 or bi-weekly income by 2.15 to achieve a monthly average income. This standard applies to many households in Colorado who earn weekly or bi-weekly pay for work.

The proposed language in (2)(c) would allow a simplified conversion to a flat 4x multiplier for weekly income and 2x multiplier for bi-weekly income. This is more straightforward and easier to understand for program applicants. In addition, more households in extreme poverty could potentially be eligible for the program, since it would bring some households under the countable monthly income threshold for the program by counting 7.5% less of their income. This isn’t a large amount of countable income (a household making \$100 per week would only have \$30 less countable income per month) but it can still make a significant difference for these households experiencing extreme poverty who are just above current income thresholds. Therefore, this change would attenuate the benefits “cliff” where households are just over income cutoffs.

We have seen this change implemented successfully in other states, and the training need for county offices could be grouped into the other program changes in the bill for a minimal training impact.

This small change could have massive and measurable positive impacts for recipient households and their local community economies while creating greater simplicity in government program guidelines. It is for this reason, among others, that we enthusiastically support HB22-1259.

Thank you so much in advance for your time and consideration.



SUPPORT HB 1259 – CONCERNING MODIFICATIONS TO COLORADO WORKS

Healthy Together urges your support of HB 1259 to modify and improve the Colorado Works Program. Specifically, we support amendment language that allows the Department to review and consider information technology solutions for the Colorado Works Program.

Colorado has struggled in many federal programs, including SNAP and WIC, with below national averages for eligibility and enrollment. The expectation of eligible individuals for the Colorado Works Program and other federal program programs is extremely high, needing a convenient and user-friendly experience to engage with and enroll in federal programs.

Healthy Together is currently working with CDPHE to modernize the WIC experience, integrating disparate datasets, providing a modern messaging platform to engage with residents, providing data automation when available, providing real-time reporting, and allowing user permissions for both state and local agencies to have access to appropriate information and tools to maximize outreach and enrollment.

The information technology systems of the Colorado Works Program need to be reviewed so it does not fall victim to the same processes and technology that have plagued other federal programs eligibility percentages in Colorado. A significant shift in strategy and technology needs to happen. These changes are already happening within the WIC program as they focus on user experience, raising the bar for customer service through automating many manual processes and regularly engaging with their program participants.

Accordingly, Healthy Together supports language to allow information technology to transform the Colorado Works Program. The standard is already being set and is available with many of the components that are already being implemented by CDPHE with WIC through Healthy Together.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jake Muai
Regional Vice President, Partnership Development
Healthy Together

Dear Members of the House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee:

On behalf of Rose Community Foundation, I write to express our support for House Bill 22-1259 (Modifications to the Colorado Works Program) and respectfully encourage members of the House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee to vote in favor.

As a community foundation representing the seven-county Greater Denver region, we work closely with a wide range of incredible nonprofits that are on the ground serving those in our communities who are furthest from opportunity. Because of these organizations' longstanding relationships with and work on behalf of populations most excluded or disadvantaged by existing systems and policies, Rose Community Foundation greatly values their perspectives around emerging needs and policy solutions designed to close gaps in opportunity and improve outcomes for *all* Coloradans.

We support HB22-1259 because over a dozen of our nonprofit partners have stated loudly and clearly that 1) TANF basic cash assistance is the most targeted approach Colorado can take to reduce extreme poverty, but 2) Colorado's program does not reflect our state's economic evolution since TANF was created in 1996 and is not currently equipped to meet the growing needs of Coloradans for whom the program is intended to serve.

Colorado is growing at a rapid rate, which on the whole brings tremendous opportunity and contributes to innovation and diversification that strengthens and improves our communities. But we have also seen that too often the benefits of this growth and prosperity are not evenly accessible to people in our region, and that rapid growth can even exacerbate longstanding challenges for those furthest from opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and widened many of these inequities.

And yet, our state's TANF basic cash assistance program is, in many ways, stuck in the 1990s. Colorado's TANF statute has not been meaningfully updated in 15 years and is not designed to adequately support today's families who are living in poverty. TANF payments and eligibility have not evolved along with dramatic cost-of-living increases over the past several decades. As a result, the ratio of people living in poverty to people receiving TANF payments has nearly tripled in Colorado over the past 25 years. This is unacceptable and a clear sign that the system requires restructuring.

The median rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Denver was \$2,090 per month in 2021. The rent affordable to a family receiving Colorado's current maximum TANF benefit is \$152 per month, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The amount of money a family needs to live in our community today is very different than it was 25 years ago, and our poverty-reduction tools must reflect that reality. HB22-1259's plan to increase TANF cash assistance and ensure that it keeps up with the rising cost of living is a critical step toward helping our state's poorest families achieve some degree of basic financial stability, now and into the future.

Improving TANF basic cash assistance will immediately strengthen the wellbeing of Colorado children and families who are currently facing the greatest barriers. Rose Community Foundation proudly joins our partners in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, along with service providers and directly impacted individuals, who aspire for a modernized Colorado Works program that effectively carries out its goal of "helping low-income families achieve economic self-sufficiency." As our state emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, this bill represents a key opportunity to ensure an equitable recovery, properly invest in Colorado's children and families, and reimagine a more economically inclusive future for our state.

Lindy Eichenbaum Lent
President and CEO, Rose Community Foundation