

# 2011 Safety Net Report: Impacts of TANF & Disability Lifeline Reductions





**“There should be more help for families that are working and are trying.”**

*~ Jean, Port Angeles*

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October 2011

We all hope that if we face a job loss or become disabled, we will have the support we need and the opportunity for a good quality of life. Strong public systems like Disability Lifeline (DL) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) ensure all people can meet their basic needs when times are tough, as well as lay the foundation for economic recovery.

Safety net programs, such as DL and TANF, are needed more than ever. According to the latest report from the U.S. Census Bureau, poverty rates are at an all-time high. The federal government considers a family of four with annual earnings of less than \$23,000 to be living in poverty. In 2010, 9.2 million families lived in poverty, up from 8.8 million in 2009.

In Washington State, nearly 890,000 people now live below the federal poverty line. **This means 84,000 more Washingtonians have slipped into poverty since 2009.**

Despite the increasing demand for TANF and DL, recent budget cuts have caused thousands of families to lose all, or a portion, of the support provided by these programs. The following summary outlines the 2011 TANF and DL budget cuts and describes the impact of these cuts on low-income families.

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**“All I need is a home, electricity, food and water. I don’t need anything else. I just want to live. Nothing more. But it’s a struggle.”**

**~ Tina, Spokane**



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**“I used to get \$453 a month on TANF, now I get \$385. How am I supposed to survive on that? I can’t pay for car insurance, I can’t pay my power bill; I pay my rent and that’s it. TANF isn’t enough to support yourself, let alone a child.”**

**~ Kim, Vancouver**

# Part I: Summary of Cuts to TANF during the 2011 Legislative Session

Washington's WorkFirst program, our state's TANF system, strives to improve the well-being of struggling families with children by helping them reach economic security through employment. TANF's cash grant provides a critical safety net for families so they are able to meet their most basic needs, such as rent, utilities, groceries, and clothing. The program's medical coverage allows parents to access the care they need and helps build strong, healthy families and communities. When made available, TANF's supportive services, such as the Working Connections Child Care program, educational opportunities and vocational training, and work supports, such as transportation assistance, allow parents to gain new skills and find steady employment.

Despite TANF's vital role in supporting families and children, recent budget cuts have caused thousands of families to lose much

**“My TANF grant is \$562 a month. My rent is \$500. I am living on \$12/month right now with three kids.”**  
~ Angela, Vancouver

needed support provided by the program. **During the 2011 Legislative Session, devastating cuts totaling nearly \$380 million were made to TANF.** To put this into perspective, these budget cuts are equivalent to 61% of the cuts made to Washington's entire higher education system during the 2011 Legislative Session.<sup>1</sup> The Governor, who controls the TANF box in the state budget, made the bulk of these cuts; however, the legislature also made significant reductions through ESSB 5921. This round of cuts to TANF exacerbates the impact of the deep reductions made to the program every year since the onset of the state's budget crisis in 2009. These cuts will be deeply felt among low-income families across our state at a time when support is needed more than ever.

## New WorkFirst Time Limits

### **WorkFirst 60-Month Time Limit**

Beginning in February 2011, the Governor implemented a strict, 60-month lifetime limit of TANF receipt.<sup>2</sup> **Over 5,500 families and nearly 13,000 children lost their only source of income at the time of implementation,** with additional families reaching the lifetime limit and losing their benefits every month.<sup>3</sup> This policy change affects families who have “played by the rules” and have diligently searched for work and fulfilled WorkFirst's participation requirements.

In the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression, unemployment is soaring, families are depleting their savings to make ends meet, and other safety net programs have experienced unprecedented budget cuts. Implementing a strict lifetime limit of TANF receipt means that thousands of families who are doing everything they can to find employment will be left without any form of support or economic security.

### **Child-Only 60-Month Time Limit**

Beginning in November 2011, a strict, 60-month lifetime limit of TANF receipt will be applied to child-only TANF cases with a parent in the home. Affected children will lose their TANF grant even if their parents' income is too low to provide for their basic needs. **This cut will deepen child poverty in our state.**

## Cash Grant Reductions

### **15% Cut to TANF Cash Grant**

TANF's cash grant is designed to help low-income families meet their most basic needs while parents look for employment. This critical assistance is often the difference between a family living in a car or in a home, or parents having to make impossible choices such as paying utility bills or adequately clothing their children.

<sup>1</sup> Washington's higher education system was cut by \$617.5 million (22.1%) during the 2011 Legislative Session; this cut was offset by tuition increases, so the net reduction was \$142.5 million (5.1%).

<sup>2</sup> Federal law imposes a 60-month lifetime limit of TANF recipient, but it allows states to elect to exempt 20% of their caseloads from this limit. Washington State has never come close to reaching the exemption limit.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Financial Management. 2011. <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/>.

In February 2011, the Governor cut the TANF cash grant by 15%, decreasing the benefit level from \$562 to \$478 per month for a family of three. This reduced grant only covers 26% of the resources needed for a family to maintain a basic standard of living as defined by the state.<sup>4</sup> Although the cash grant continues to be a vital support for families, the cut to cash benefits makes it nearly impossible for families make ends meet.

The TANF cash grant amount also functions as an eligibility criterion for the program. For example, if a family of three has an unearned income<sup>5</sup> of more than \$478 per month or an earned income<sup>6</sup> of more than \$956 per month, then they are not eligible for TANF. Not only did the 15% cut to cash benefits reduce the amount of resources available to TANF recipients, but it also reduced the income threshold families must fall under in order qualify for TANF. **Thus, fewer struggling families are now eligible for this crucial safety net program.**

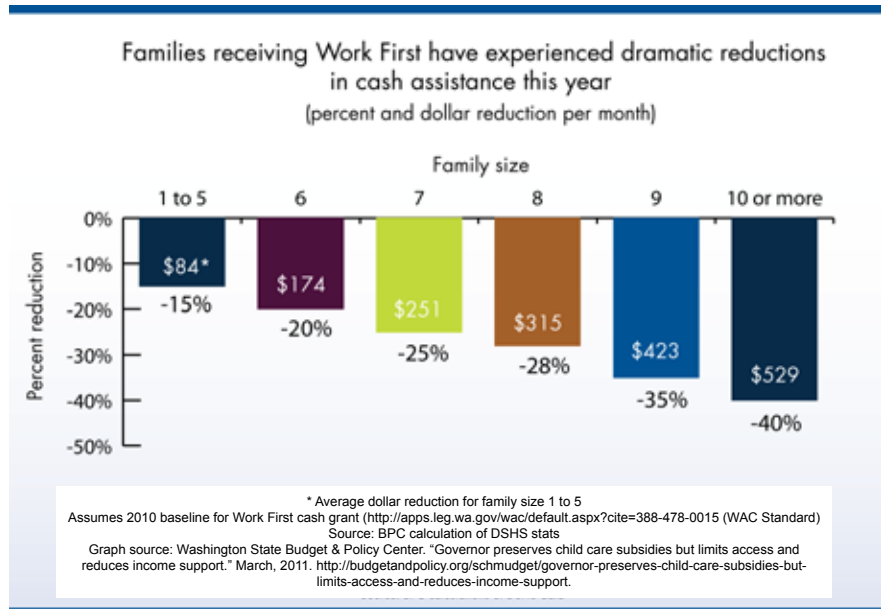
### **Additional Cuts to Families with More than Five Members**

Prior to February 2011, the TANF cash grant was adjusted according to family size, with larger families receiving larger grants up to a limit of ten family members. **Now, household grant sizes are capped at five members, with all families with five or more members receiving \$648 per month in cash assistance.** For example, a family of seven formerly would have received \$850 per month, but due to the cap on family size, now only receives \$648 per month. This policy change impacts 1,840 families<sup>7</sup> and represents a dramatic reduction in resources available to large families.

Refugees living in Washington will be disproportionately affected by this policy since Refugee Cash Assistance, a federally funded program, is directly tied to the TANF cash grant standard. **Like the TANF grant, the Refugee Cash Assistance grant is now capped at \$648 for families with five or more members.**

### **Diversion Cash Assistance Reduction**

Diversion Cash Assistance (DCA) is an emergency grant for families who are not enrolled in TANF, but whose incomes are so low that they meet TANF eligibility criteria. Eligible families can receive a one time DCA grant in a twelve month period to help cover short-term emergency costs, including car repairs, child care, medical, housing, and food expenses. DCA is important because it helps low-wage workers weather one-time financial emergencies and prevents families from experiencing further economic hardship and instability. Between November 2009 and October 2010, over 8,500 families received help from the DCA program.<sup>8</sup> In January 2011, the Governor reduced the maximum DCA grant amount from \$1,500 to \$1,250, diminishing an important safety net program for families who are struggling to make ends meet.



### **Additional Requirements/Emergent Need Benefit Reduction**

The Additional Requirements/Emergent Need (AR-EN) benefit provides cash support to current TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance recipients who have an emergency housing or utility need. AR-EN grants help families avoid eviction and homelessness, leave a domestic violence situation, keep their utilities on, and repair damage to their homes. Eligible families formerly were able to access up to \$750 per year in AR-EN support. However, the Governor cut the AR-EN grant by limiting

<sup>4</sup> Washington State Budget & Policy Center. "Value of work supports for low-income families at historical low." January 2011. <http://budgetandpolicy.org/schmudget/value-of-workfirst-grant-at-historical-low>.

<sup>5</sup> Unearned income includes income that does not come from wages, such as SSI benefits, a pension, or unemployment insurance.

<sup>6</sup> WorkFirst's Earned Income Disregard program helps low-wage workers stay in the workforce by allowing workers to "disregard", or only count, 50% of their income when applying for TANF benefits.

<sup>7</sup> Washington State Budget & Policy Center. "Governor preserves child care subsidies but limits access and reduces income support." March, 2011. <http://budgetandpolicy.org/schmudget/governor-preserves-child-care-subsidies-but-limits-access-and-reduces-income-support>.

<sup>8</sup> Office of Financial Management. 2011. <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/>.

its availability to only once per lifetime, leaving thousands of TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance families without resources to address housing and utility emergencies. Furthermore, this cut is retroactive; so, families who have relied on AR-EN in the past will not be able to access this emergency benefit again.

## WorkFirst Eligibility Changes

### **Means Testing for Child-Only Cases**

During the last legislative session, the legislature implemented a major eligibility change for child-only TANF cases without a parent in the home, which include children who are cared for by kin and legal guardians. Under the former guidelines, only the child's income and resources were counted when determining eligibility. Now, the child's kinship caregiver or legal guardian's income will be subject to a means test in addition to the child's income.

For example, under the former rules, if a grandparent was the legal guardian of a grandchild, then only the grandchild's income was tested to determine the family's eligibility to receive TANF. Now, both the grandparent and the grandchild's income are counted. There are over 10,400 families affected by this change,<sup>9</sup> and those with household incomes between 200-300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) will be subject to a sliding scale benefit reduction. Households with incomes above 300% FPL will be ineligible for benefits, causing children and families to lose much needed support.

## Changes to Working Connections Child Care

### **Working Connections Child Care Co-Payment Increase**

The Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program provides subsidized child care for TANF recipients and other low-income families. Child care is a major barrier to employment for low-income families, since parents who have low-wage jobs often do not earn enough to cover the cost of child care. Without the subsidy provided by WCCC, thousands of low-income families would not be able to afford to work or participate in educational and vocational training opportunities.

During the last legislative session, the Governor increased the WCCC co-payment amount by \$5 for participants' whose co-payment was \$60 per month, and increased the sliding scale co-payments for families with incomes above 137.5% of the FPL. These changes increased the cost of child care for over 20,000 low-income families.<sup>10</sup>

### **Working Connections Child Care Cap**

In addition to increasing the WCCC monthly co-payment amount, the Governor also capped the WCCC caseload at 35,200 cases. Enrollment into the WCCC program is now prioritized for families receiving TANF and families of children with special needs. Other eligible families will receive child care on a "first come, first served" basis, but there currently is a waiting list for the program.

<sup>9</sup> Office of Financial Management. 2011. <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/>.

<sup>10</sup> Washington State Budget & Policy Center. "Governor preserves child care subsidies but limits access and reduces income support." March, 2011. <http://budgetandpolicy.org/schmudget/governor-preserves-child-care-subsidies-but-limits-access-and-reduces-income-support>.

“Two years ago, I lost my child care when they lowered the income level requirements for qualifying. I couldn't pay for child care because it was about \$800 a month and I wouldn't have enough money to pay for my rent and also for child care. Because I didn't have child care I lost my job. It was a snowball effect.”

~ Veronica, Kent

“We have jobs and lose them because we can't get childcare. It's hurting people who are trying to work!”

~ Amber, Lakewood

## **Working Connections Child Care Eligibility Changes**

The Governor recently reduced the WCCC income eligibility limit from 200% to 175% of the FPL, causing over 1,100 families to lose their subsidized child care benefit.<sup>11</sup> National poverty experts have established 200% of the FPL as an absolute minimum amount of resources needed by a family to meet their basic needs.<sup>12</sup> Thus, families with incomes below 200% of the FPL who are no longer eligible for WCCC will struggle to hold down a job and pay for the full cost of child care, putting them at risk of losing their economic gains in the labor market.

## **Sanctions**

### **Permanent Disqualification**

WorkFirst participants must fulfill many requirements in order to stay eligible for the program, such as regularly meeting with caseworkers, attending trainings, and completing job search activities. They also face real barriers to meeting these requirements, including not having access to reliable transportation, a spatial mismatch between services and where low-income families live, juggling the needs and schedules of young children, illness and disability, and domestic violence.

**“I have to take three buses to get to Workfirst and with the cuts to the bus system it’s really unreliable. If I get there late, they won’t let me sign in. Then I get sanctioned.”**  
~ Lydia, Auburn

Last session, the legislature approved a much stricter sanction policy for WorkFirst families that will go in effect beginning November 2011. WorkFirst families who receive three full-family sanctions will now be permanently disqualified

from receiving TANF benefits. Although accountability is important, the new permanent disqualification policy is too severe for families who face considerable barriers to always complying with WorkFirst requirements on time.

## **Other cuts**

### **Elimination of Child Support Pass Through**

Recently, Child Support Pass Through was eliminated for TANF recipients. Prior to May 2011, recipients who received child support were able to keep a portion of their child support check, called a Child Support Pass Through, in addition to their TANF grant. Under the former rules, parents with one child could keep a maximum of \$100 per month of their child support payment, and parents with two or more children could keep \$200. Now, 100% of a TANF recipient’s child support payment is paid directly to the state. This cut eliminates a significant source of income for TANF families at a time when other parts of the program have been severely cut.

### **State Board of Community and Technical Colleges Reductions**

Educational opportunities and vocational training prepare WorkFirst parents with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce. However, budget cuts made in October 2010 have ended tuition assistance for former WorkFirst parents, impacting over 1,200 students,<sup>13</sup> and education and training expenditures for TANF recipients have been reduced by 10%. These reductions make it more difficult for WorkFirst parents to obtain the training they need to find a living wage job.

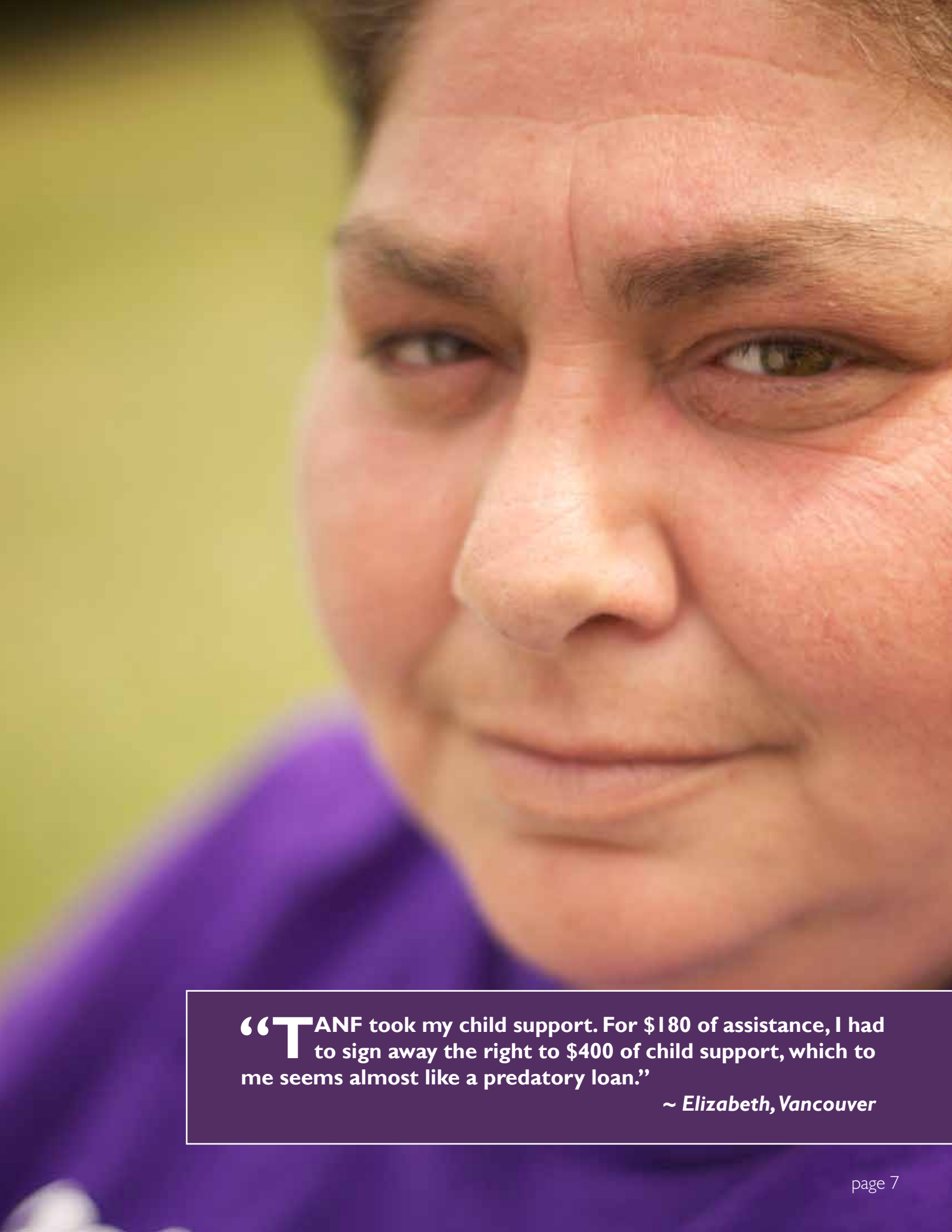
### **Department of Commerce Reductions**

The Department of Commerce operates several supported work programs, including Community Jobs, Community Job Connection, Career Jump, and Career Development. These programs help WorkFirst participants gain job skills and work experience and prepare them to enter and succeed in the workforce. The Governor cut the Department of Commerce’s work readiness programs by 9.8% in October 2010. This cut comes at time when jobs are scarce and skills and experience are needed more than ever to secure employment.

11 Office of Financial Management. 2011. <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/>.

12 Came, D. & Gardner, E. “Comparing Standards of Economic Distress.” January 2007. [http://www.ofm.wa.gov/humanserv/poverty/economic\\_distress.pdf](http://www.ofm.wa.gov/humanserv/poverty/economic_distress.pdf).

13 Office of Financial Management. 2010. <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/>.



**“T**ANF took my child support. For \$180 of assistance, I had to sign away the right to \$400 of child support, which to me seems almost like a predatory loan.”

*~ Elizabeth, Vancouver*

## **Employment Security Department Reductions**

The Employment Security Department (ESD) provides services for WorkFirst participants who are seeking employment. Services include job search tools and skills, and support services such as transportation assistance. In October 2010, the Governor suspended ESD's Career Services Program, a cut that impacted over 4,000 families,<sup>14</sup> and cut its employment services budget by 2.1%. These cuts strip much needed job search resources at a time when jobs are especially difficult to find.

**“My grandkid’s mom was on TANF for 60 months. They made this rule where if it’s 60 months then you no longer have TANF. That’s crazy to me because you have to think ...what about the kids? Nobody’s thinking about what’s best for the children. The legislature needs to do something about that law.”**

**~ Kim, Kent**

## **Part II: Disability Lifeline Cut Deeply and Restructured During 2011 Legislative Session**

A strong social safety net gives us the assurance that if we become disabled and are unable to work, we will have access to support and the opportunity for a decent quality of life. The Disability Lifeline (DL) program, called General Assistance for the Unemployable (GAU) prior to 2010, is an important piece of our safety net that helps people who are unable to work due to a physical or mental disability meet their basic needs. The program provides medical coverage and a very modest cash grant for recipients, which is often their only source of income. DL helps disabled adults pay their rent and utility bills, purchase critical prescription medications, and cover the basic essentials, such as toilet paper and tooth paste that cannot be purchased with food stamps.

Despite the importance of DL/GAU, the state legislature has dramatically reduced funding for this program every year since 2009. Formerly, the cash grant amount was \$339 per month, but it has been cut over the past three years to its current level of \$197 per month.<sup>15</sup> Although the small cash grant does not provide enough resources for recipients to meet all of their basic needs, it remains a critical source of support for nearly 38,000<sup>16</sup> Washingtonians and is often the difference between housing and homelessness, or between a meal and going hungry.

During the 2011 Legislative Session, the legislature drastically cut and restructured DL. On October 31, 2011, the DL program will be eliminated and three separate programs will go into effect on November 1, 2011 to replace it. Although the legislature should be lauded for preserving a critical piece of our state's safety net during a budget crisis, the cuts and program restructure went too far. The new programs are called: 1) the Aged, Blind & Disabled program, 2) the Pregnant Women Assistance program, and 3) the Housing and Essential Needs program. While well-intended, these programs provide inadequate support to former DL recipients and insufficient resources have been allocated to serve the entire DL caseload.

### **The Aged, Blind & Disabled Program**

#### **Who the ABD Program Serves**

The Aged, Blind and Disabled (ABD) program will be implemented on November 1, 2011 and will serve people formerly eligible for DL-X, GA-X, and three smaller DL/GAU programs that primarily served documented immigrants over the age

<sup>14</sup> Office of Financial Management. 2010. <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/>.

<sup>15</sup> As of October 2011, the DL cash grant amount was set at \$197 per month for all DL recipients. Beginning on November 1, 2011, the cash grant will be eliminated for over 20,000 DL-U recipients and the entire DL program will be replaced by the Aged, Blind and Disabled program, the Pregnant Women Assistance program, and the Housing and Essential Needs Program.

<sup>16</sup> Twelve month average DL statewide total caseload from 6/2010 – 7/2011. Data Source: eMAPS from ACES Data Warehouse June 2011 Load.



**“M**y disability was cut almost in half; I went from \$339 to \$197 a month. Not only can I not afford to pay any bills, to me it feels like they don’t seem to care.”

*~ Paul, Vancouver*

**“My hopes are to attend a training program that helps you to improve your reading, writing, and math skills. It’s removing the barriers, so that I can get a decent job. It’s helping me to become employable, competitive...that’s where it’s at. This is the answer for me.”**

**~ Connie, Edmonds**

**“You should be allowed to go to any college that is going to help you get off of TANF. If you have goals you should be allowed to pursue them.”**

**~ Angela, Vancouver**

65 who are ineligible for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Those who are eligible for the ABD program include people who are living on an extremely low income<sup>17</sup> and are: 1) age 65 or older, 2) blind, or 3) have a long-term disability and will likely qualify for federal SSI benefits.

### ***ABD Cash Grant is Too Small***

ABD recipients will receive Medicaid coverage and a monthly \$197 cash grant to help cover housing costs and other basic needs. The cash grant is a critical income support, but it is not enough to cover all the needs of ABD recipients. With a monthly income of \$197, ABD recipients are forced to make impossible choices, such as having to decide whether to purchase a bus ticket to visit the doctor, or to pay a co-payment for an important medication.

It makes sense from both a state fiscal and human perspective to restore the cash grant amount to \$339 per month, its former level under GAU. A higher cash grant would provide a more adequate income, better economic security, and a higher quality of life for ABD recipients. Additionally, the federal government reimburses the state for the cost of the cash grant when ABD clients transition onto SSI. Approximately 71% of the ABD caseload is likely to qualify for SSI,<sup>18</sup> so the retroactive cash grant reimbursement from the federal government significantly mitigates the cost to the state.

### **Pregnant Women Assistance Program**

#### ***Who the PWA Program Serves***

The Pregnant Women Assistance (PWA) program provides \$197 per month in cash assistance for low-income, pregnant women. PWA recipients also receive health care coverage under Medicaid.<sup>19</sup> In order to qualify for the PWA program, a pregnant woman must meet the income eligibility standard for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, but be ineligible for TANF for a reason other than being sanctioned. For example, a pregnant woman who lost her TANF benefits due to the state’s new, 60-month lifetime limit of TANF receipt would be eligible for PWA while she is pregnant.

#### ***Pregnant Women’s Basic Needs Are Not Met under PWA***

While the PWA’s \$197 monthly cash grant is a vital source of income for recipients, it simply does not provide enough support to ensure that women are able to stay housed, access public transportation, and pay for essentials such as clothes, medicine and basic hygiene products. Furthermore, the creation of the PWA program illustrates the fragmentation of our public safety net and the cumulative effects of budget cuts at a time when economic security programs are needed more than ever. For example, the state’s new, 60-month lifetime limit of TANF receipt strips away important support for recipients who have “played by the rules” and have fulfilled

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<sup>17</sup> To be income eligible for ABD, a recipient’s income must be below \$428 per month for a couple or below \$339 per month for an individual.

<sup>18</sup> Twelve month average DL statewide total caseload from 6/2010 – 7/2011. Data Source: eMAPS from ACES Data Warehouse June 2011 Load. The state is only reimbursed for ABD recipients who are accepted into the SSI program.

<sup>19</sup> Pregnant women with incomes below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for Medicaid during their pregnancy and for 60 days after their pregnancy ends; they may continue to receive Medicaid if they are income eligible.

TANF's participation requirements. The PWA program is a temporary stop-gap to support pregnant women who would otherwise qualify for TANF. But what happens postpartum when a pregnancy ends and a family is ineligible for support under PWA and TANF? How will families survive with no income in this economy?

## Housing and Essential Needs Program (HEN)

### **Who the HEN Program Serves**

The Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) program provides housing assistance and essential needs to recipients of Medical Care Services (MCS). Effective on November 1, 2011, the HEN program will serve people who were formally eligible for the DL-U and GA-U programs. MCS is a state operated health insurance program available to people who are facing a short-term disability of at least 90 days and who have a monthly income below \$428 for a couple or below \$339 for an individual.

### **Medical Care Services is No Longer Guaranteed for All Who Qualify**

For the first time, MCS benefits will only be available as long as the demand does not exceed the resources allocated for the program by the state. Before the 2011 Legislative Session, anyone who met the MCS disability and income eligibility requirements could access the program. Now, the availability of MCS benefits will be dependent upon the funds allocated to the program in the state operating budget. If funds are exhausted, eligible people will have to join a waiting list in order to receive MCS benefits. Additionally, since access to the new HEN program is dependent on having an MCS card, this policy change will also determine who is able to access housing assistance and essential needs.

### **Cash Benefits Eliminated for Thousands of Disabled Adults**

Under the DL-U and GA-U programs, recipients received a monthly cash grant in addition to MCS benefits. During the 2011 Legislative Session, the legislature eliminated the cash grant and replaced it with housing assistance and essential need banks under the HEN program. This change eliminated cash benefits for over 20,000 disabled adults with no other source of income.<sup>20</sup> Through the HEN program, MCS recipients are able to access essential needs, such as personal health and hygiene items, cleaning supplies, and transportation assistance through service agencies, as well as housing assistance. However, due to inadequate funding, not all MCS recipients will be able to access housing assistance, even though they are eligible for the program. It is anticipated that only 50% of MCS recipients will receive housing assistance during the 2011 – 2013 biennium

The elimination of cash benefits for people with short-term disabilities who are unable to work is an alarming policy decision. Not only will people lose their only source of income, but those who qualify for MCS might not be able to access the HEN benefits if the allocated funding for MCS is exhausted.<sup>21</sup> **These program changes paired with reduced funding will likely lead to more homelessness and less economic security among MCS and HEN recipients.**

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20 Twelve month average of statewide DL-U caseload from 6/2010 – 7/2011. Data Source: eMAPS from ACES Data Warehouse June 2011 Load.

21 All current MCS recipients under the Disability Lifeline program will retain their medical benefits during the transition from Disability Lifeline to the Housing and Essential Needs program. Only new MCS applicants will be affected by the limited MCS funding in the state operating budget.

“You’ll notice every place that you’ve been to that they will only help you with the last \$75. Every place that is willing to help you, it’s only the last \$75. What about the beginning? You have no start place.”

~ Mary, Kent

“When my grant got cut, I lost my apartment. My daughter and I have been homeless since the summer. Try to find a place to rent for \$385/month.”

~ Darla, Yakima

“**M**yself and my two-year-old son, we get \$311 in food stamps. Up until two years ago my husband and I were both working, but then he suddenly passed away. I was pregnant at the time with my son, and I was putting one foot in front of the other..

“**I** had to stop working. Someone at DSHS told me that the amount for TANF was set in the 80s and it hasn't been changed since. On \$567 a month, what most people spend on gas and coffee, we made too much to qualify for TANF.

“**W**e get assistance through Medicaid and food stamps. I pay \$460 dollars in rent, and then have \$80 dollars left over for everything. I get some minutes on my phone, the minimum to get me through. There is nothing left. Don't forget shampoo and toilet paper, you know things that people take for granted. Those are luxuries at my house.

“**I** think my biggest barrier right now is child care. DSHS will not even give you a little bit of child care, even a couple days to go look for a job, you know, actively, without towing along a two-year-old. They say, you get a job and we'll give you child care when you turn in your pay stub, what am I supposed to do for the first two weeks that I am working?

“**I**t's a rock and a hard place, I want to work, I don't want to be on the system. I haven't been on the system prior to my husband's death. And it is frustrating.”

~ Angela , Tacoma



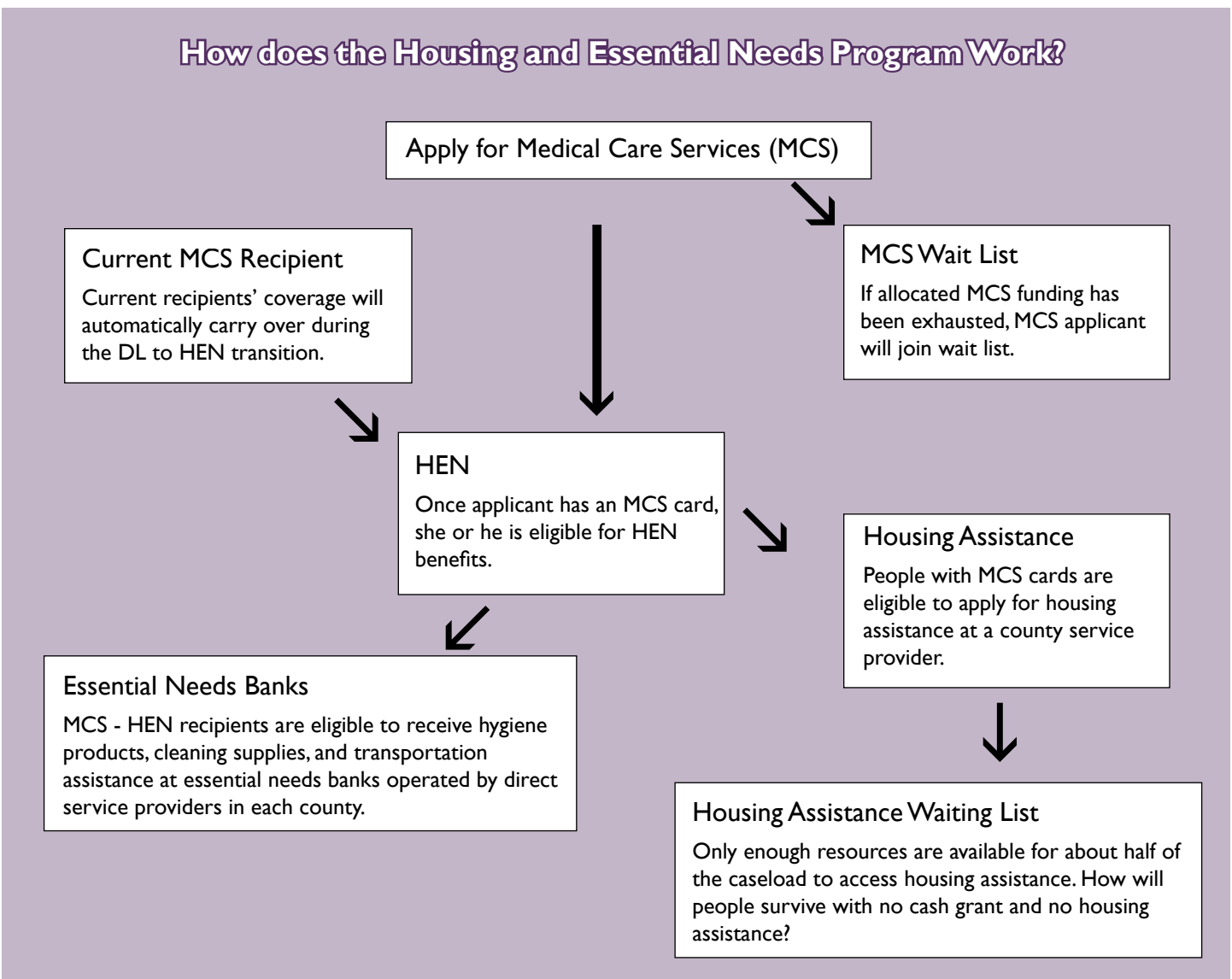
## Geographic Barriers to Essential Need Banks


Furthermore, the elimination of cash benefits creates additional barriers to MCS and HEN recipients in meeting their basic needs. Cash benefits are easier and more efficient for people to use than essential need banks and housing assistance programs. With cash, people can pay their rent and bills directly, and visit a nearby store to purchase basic hygiene items such as toilet paper. Under the HEN program, recipients must travel to a county social service provider to apply for housing assistance and to acquire essential hygiene items. The requirement to travel across town or to another city to access items such as toilet paper, tooth paste, bus tickets, and soap is a real barrier for people who have no income, who have a disability, and who live in rural counties or in communities with limited public transportation options. A monthly cash grant helps mitigate this barrier by allowing people to access resources that are close by.

## Low-Income Communities Can't Afford another Round of Cuts

At a time when an increasing number of Washingtonians are seeking help to weather this economic storm, deep cuts to our safety net threaten the economic security, health, and well-being of our communities. We must respond to the current state budget crisis by helping people meet their basic needs. Potential new cuts, in combination with the last three years' devastating cuts, are simply too much for low-income families to bear during the worst recession in decades. **More revenue is needed to prevent further reductions to the public systems that help people meet their basic needs and have opportunities to prosper.** It is our sincere hope that we can work together to balance this budget without compromising our values.

### How does the Housing and Essential Needs Program Work?





**“I signed up for the Sunnyside Housing Authority and was told that there were only three units that I would be eligible for and that I was number 424 on the waiting list. I am just trying to find out what will happen, if GAU/DL is taken away will there be housing vouchers or not?”**

**“People who are very trustworthy can give entirely opposite information about what is going to happen. You talk about your hopes for the future, when you are in this kind of situation. In this kind of poverty you gauge your future about 12 hours in advance: where am I going to sleep tonight? What am I going to eat? It feels hard, without a stable housing situation to think in terms of a month, 6 months, a year or two years down the road.”**

**~ Debbie, Yakima**



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