

March 24, 2021

Human Services Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
210 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Representatives Abercrombie, Moore, Berthel, and Case, and Members of the Committee:

We write on behalf of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), a national, nonpartisan nonprofit organization advancing policy solutions for people with low incomes. CLASP strongly supports H.B. 6635, which would end the Temporary Family Assistance program family cap policy and remove the 21-month time limit in the program. These punitive policies reduce access to cash assistance for families with the lowest incomes. They also set Connecticut behind other states in the region. The bill also would increase cash assistance benefits based on a cost-of-living adjustment in years when there is a lapse in funds appropriated to the Temporary Family Assistance program. We encourage your committee to pass H.B. 6635 and support Connecticut families with kids.

Temporary Family Assistance is a critical income support for families with children with very low incomes. It allows parents to buy such essentials as toothpaste, diapers, gas or bus fare, clothing, and school supplies for their children or themselves, as well as food or housing not covered by other public benefits.

The Temporary Family Assistance family cap policy penalizes mothers who have children while receiving cash assistance by reducing the additional benefit amount that families can receive for such children by 50 percent. The policy is rooted in harmful, racist, and sexist stereotypes of the “welfare queen” and was created to discourage childbearing among poor women.¹ But research finds that family cap policies do not reduce birth rates among cash assistance recipients.² The policy does ensure that families receive less financial support for their children, leaving the children worse off. This policy especially harms the youngest children, by taking resources from them and increasing parental stress at a key developmental moment.³ CLASP strongly supports the removal of such outdated family cap policies.

Connecticut is the last remaining state in the New England region to have the outdated family cap policy in place.⁴ In recent years, the neighboring states of New Jersey and Massachusetts have repealed their family cap policies, recognizing that the policies hurt the well-being of children and are founded on outdated stereotypes of cash assistance recipients. Lawmakers should end the Connecticut family cap policy to align the state with its neighbors and to ensure that Connecticut families are not punished by outdated and ineffective policy choices from decades earlier.

H.B. 6635 would increase the maximum time limit that parents can receive Temporary Family Assistance benefits in Connecticut from 21 months to 60 months. Connecticut’s current limit is among the shortest in the nation, ahead of only Arizona. The bill also would exclude the months when families received cash assistance during the COVID-19 public health emergency from counting towards their lifetime limit. We strongly support this policy. Parents’ income is volatile, and low-income families often move in and out of poverty throughout their lifetimes as their wages and living costs fluctuate.⁵ Increasing the number of

months that TANF can act as a safety net for these families, rather than booting parents off while they are still living in deep poverty, will promote financial well-being and positive outcomes for mothers. Parents should not have to worry that if they receive assistance during today's pandemic, that they will not be able to receive it at a future date if they encounter a personal crisis.

The policies included in this bill will increase access to financial support for Connecticut families with low incomes, which will reduce childhood poverty and promote positive outcomes for mothers and children. Research finds that when children receive additional income support as a child, it improves their health and well-being.⁶ Studies find that children with increased income get better grades in school and make higher earnings as adults.⁷ Income support reduces parental stress and supports positive health outcomes.

CLASP strongly supports H.B. 6635, and we encourage the Connecticut Human Services Committee to pass the bill. Especially now, as COVID-19 causes increasing rates of food insecurity and hardship for families,⁸ such financial support is essential for Connecticut's lowest income families.

You can reach out to Ashley Burnside (aburnside@clasp.org) or Elizabeth Lower-Basch (elowerbasch@clasp.org) with any questions.

Sincerely,

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Elizabeth Lower-Basch, Director of Income and Work Supports, CLASP

¹ Ife Floyd, "States Should Repeal Racist Policies Denying Benefits to Children Born to TANF Families," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/states-should-repeal-racist-policies-denying-benefits-to-children-born-to-tanf-families>.

² Patricia Donovan, "Does the Family Cap Influence Birthrates? Two New Studies Say 'No,'" *The Guttmacher Report*, <https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pubs/tgr/01/1/gr010110.pdf>.

³ Elizabeth Lower-Basch and Stephanie Schmit, "TANF and the First Year of Life: Making a Difference at a Pivotal Moment," *CLASP*, October 2, 2015, <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/tanf-and-first-year-life-making-difference-pivotal-moment>.

⁴ The Urban Institute, "The Welfare Rules Database," updated July 2019, <https://wrds.urban.org/wrd/databook.cfm>.

⁵ Signe-Mary McKernan, Caroline Ratcliffe, and Stephanie R. Cellini, "Transitioning In and Out of Poverty," *The Urban Institute*, September 2009, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/30636/411956-Transitioning-In-and-Out-of-Poverty.PDF/>.

⁶ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, "A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty," 2019, <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25246/a-roadmap-to-reducing-child-poverty>.

⁷ Arloc Sherman and Tazra Mitchell, “Economic Security Programs Help Low-Income Children Succeed Over Long Term, Many Studies Find,” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, July 17, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/economic-security-programs-help-low-income-children-succeed-over>.

⁸ Arloc Sherman, “Children Facing Very High Hardship Rates,” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, August 6, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/children-facing-very-high-hardship-rates>.