

HB 2372 TANF LIFETIME TIME LIMIT HURTS CHILDREN WHO NEED A BRIDGE OUT OF POVERTY

TANF cash assistance helps Arizona's neediest children.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cash assistance program, known as TANF, provides temporary cash benefits for the poorest mothers and children to help them meet their basic needs while moms prepare to enter or re-enter the workforce.

7 out of 10 TANF participants in Arizona are children.

The maximum benefit for a family of three is \$278 a month to help shield children from homelessness, hunger, family instability, and deprivation. Under current law, participants must engage in work activities, complete a personal responsibility agreement, develop an employment plan, cooperate with child support enforcement efforts and assure that their children are immunized and enrolled in and attending school.

In 2015, Governor Ducey signed a state budget that cut the lifetime limit for TANF participation from 24 months to 12 months. Families facing numerous hardships, instability, and barriers to employment may experience times of crisis that go beyond 12 months. In 2014, nearly one in five households participating in TANF, counted on that assistance for more than 12 months consecutively.

Arizona is the only state in the nation with a lifetime limit of only 12 months.

HB 2372 does not match Governor Ducey's proposal to extend TANF cash assistance for an additional 12 months for all parents who are actively looking for work and getting their kids to school. Although the bill language is ambiguous, the bill sponsor and the Governor's office say a parent will **not** have the opportunity for additional months of assistance if they have made a mistake that put their case into sanction status any time during their first twelve months of participation – *even if they are complying with all requirements on the day they hit their 12-month limit.*

The bill gives drug felons a second chance at success, while demanding a perfect track record of moms participating in job training and work search.

HB 2372 allows people who have been convicted of drug-related felonies to participate in SNAP benefits (Food Stamps) if they are engaging in drug treatment. Even when a mom has fixed a mistake and is meeting all program requirements, her children will be shut out from minimal support that can keep them in their homes, food on the table, and shoes on their feet.

HB 2372 creates deeper cuts to assistance to punish families who miss any of the rules during their first 12 months of benefits. The bill increases the benefit reduction from 25% to 50% for at least one month for a first sanction and states that for a second sanction DES must terminate assistance for at least one month or until the household complies.

In Arizona, only 7 out of 100 poor families with children participate in TANF cash assistance.

Time limits and benefit cuts put children at risk for neglect, instability and crisis.

A study in Maine found that families kicked off due to time limits experienced greater reliance on food banks, inability to pay utilities and other bills, and overcrowded housing or reliance on homeless shelters (Butler, Sandra; *TANF Time Limits and Maine Families*; University of Maine, 2013). For poor

children, a decline in income is strongly associated with poorer outcomes in school readiness, language development and behavior. (Dearing, Eric; *Change in the Family Income-to-Needs Matters More for Children with Less*, 2001.) According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, poverty is a factor that can contribute to child neglect.

While the state is focused on relieving businesses of regulations and requirements, HB 2372 adds new government rules, monitoring, and requirements for poor moms and their children.

The bill adds new prohibitions on the use of TANF benefits for purchasing lottery tickets, additional monitoring and questioning of participants about replacement EBT cards and out-of-state purchases, monitoring of school attendance for the children of participants, and detailed reports by DES about where SNAP and TANF benefits are spent.

“Cash benefits in Arizona are smaller now than when Congress created the assistance program 20 years ago... In 2010, Arizona cut cash-assistance eligibility to three years, from five. In 2011, it reduced the limit to two years. Then last year, it dropped to one.” – New York Times, May 20, 2016

HB 2372 should be amended to offer a meaningful step to give children a bridge out of poverty without demanding perfection from parents.