

# Welfare Advocates Group: 2013 Legislative Priorities

*The Welfare Advocates Group (WAG) is a coalition comprised of leading health and human service advocates in Washington. The WAG forwards policies that improve the health, economic security, and well-being of all people in our state.*

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## **Improve Outcomes for TANF Families**

- 1) Restore the TANF grant by 15%** – TANF provides struggling families with children a modest cash grant to help meet their most basic needs, such as housing, clothing, and hygiene items. In 2011, the TANF grant was cut by 15%, decreasing the benefit level to \$478 per month for a family of three. The reduced grant is equivalent to 31% of the Federal Poverty Level<sup>i</sup> and only covers 26% of the resources needed for a family to maintain a basic standard of living<sup>ii</sup>. Restoring the 15% TANF grant cut will help families stabilize and will accelerate their pathway to economic security. **WAG supports restoring the 15% cut to the TANF grant.** Policy requires an RCW change and budget action.
  
- 2) Modify TANF Time Limit Policy** – In 2011, the Secretary of DSHS implemented a strict 60-month time limit of TANF receipt. This policy has ended cash assistance to 15,000 families since its inception. Prior to 2011, TANF parents who were compliant with WorkFirst’s participation requirements, but unable to find a job, were eligible for a hardship extension. Parents received extensions because they faced employment barriers such as a temporary disability or the high unemployment rate due to the Great Recession. **WAG supports revising the TANF time limit policy and reinstating some of the previously eligible groups who either cannot work or cannot find work due to factors beyond their control.** Policy requires an RCW change.
  
- 3) Reform TANF to Improve Employment Outcomes** – Washington’s TANF program is hampered by restrictive federal definitions of what counts as work participation. This policy results in parents being required to participate in programs that meet federal rules rather than programs designed to move them to employment. DSHS employees are required to spend their time counting hours and verifying participation rather than focusing on helping parents develop a plan that will lead to steady employment. **WAG supports application for a federal TANF waiver of these requirements in order to free the program to focus on training, including the provision of basic and post-secondary education.** If the waiver is not available, the state should move forward with strategies that would allow it to provide services to families that maximize the likelihood of them moving off of TANF and out of poverty. Possible RCW change and budget action.

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<sup>i</sup> Finch, Ife and Schott, Liz (November 2011). “TANF benefits fell further in 2011 and are worth much less than in 1996 in most states,” Center for Budget & Policy Priorities. Retrieved from <http://www.cbpp.org/files/11-21-11pov.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Washington State Budget & Policy Center (January 2011). “Value of work supports for low-income families at historical low.” Retrieved from: <http://budgetandpolicy.org/schmudget/value-of-workfirst-grant-at-historical-low>