

Testimony
House Concurrent Resolution No. 3013
Department of Human Services
Senate Industry, Business and Labor Committee
Senator Jerry Klein, Chairman
March 10, 2021

Chairman Klein and members of the committee, I am Michele Gee, Director of the Economic Assistance Division for the Department of Human Services (Department). I am here today to provide information on the Economic Assistance Programs administered by the Department. The Economic Assistance Division is responsible for the administration of the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The Child Care Assistance Program helps pay a portion of the cost of child care for working families or for families who are enrolled in training or educational programs. Eligible families can earn up to 60% of the state median income. At the 12-month review for continuation of benefits, families remain eligible with income up to 85% of the state median income. This is a federal requirement referred to as a graduated phase-out. This requirement helps families with increased income transition from receiving benefits to becoming self-sufficient. During SFY 2020, the Program:

- Served an average of 2,780 children per month.
- Provided \$15.6 million in support of North Dakota families.
- Provided an average payment of \$466 per child per month.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program helps households with home heating costs by paying a portion of their heating bills, and by improving their home's overall energy efficiency. The program serves families with income up to 60% of state median income, which is the federal maximum for the program. During the 2020 heating season (October 1, 2019 – May 30, 2020), the Program:

- Served an average of 12,785 households.

- Provided \$12 million in support to North Dakota households.
- Provided an average payment of \$930 per household during the heating season.

The TANF program assists needy families with children who are deprived of parental support or care. This means a parent is absent due to divorce, separation, or death; or one or both parents are disabled. The eligibility income level was increased during the 2015 legislative session and is at 35% of the federal poverty level.

Based on federal regulations, the adult receiving a TANF benefit must participate in a work activity of 20 hours a week if the youngest child is under 6 years of age or 30 hours a week if the oldest child is over 6 years of age. However, due to the national pandemic, the mandatory work activity hours are currently being waived. During SFY 2020, the program served an average of 945 families per month, providing an average benefit of \$297 per family. Of those served:

- 81% served were children
- 52% of ND TANF cases are child-only cases (children in the care of a non-legally responsible caretaker)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides benefits to supplement the food budget of lower-income families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency. The federal maximum income eligibility limit is set at 200% of the federal poverty level (equivalent to 60% of the state median income).

Per federal regulations, adults without dependent children must work at least 20 hours or more a week to maintain continuous eligibility or they may only receive SNAP benefits for 3 months in a 3-year period, unless they are exempt. Adults exempt from work requirements include individuals:

- Who are employed and working at least 30 hours weekly or receiving weekly earnings at least equal to the federal minimum wage multiplied by 30 hours,
- Under 18 or 50 years of age or older,
- Responsible for the care of a child or incapacitated household member,
- Participating in TANF JOBS,

- Who are medically certified as physically or mentally unable to work,
- Who are pregnant.

The mandatory work requirement for SNAP is currently being waived due to the national pandemic.

During SFY 2020, the program:

- Served an average of 48,323 individuals or 23,178 households per month.
- Provided \$78 million in support to households.
- Provided an average payment of \$280 per month.

In addition to testimony, I have included a handout that provides more information about the Economic Assistance Programs and State Median Income Levels.

This concludes my testimony and would be happy to answer any questions.