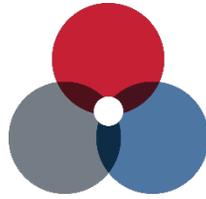


# Ohio's Cash Assistance Program Fails to Meet Ongoing Need

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**August 23, 2021**



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### Introduction

This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of welfare reform, when the federal government ended the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) entitlement program and created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWOA) in 1996.

Despite this change being lauded as “welfare reform,” the TANF cash assistance program is a meager safety net for families in poverty as compared to the AFDC and other existing benefits programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The structure of TANF itself creates barriers to OWF being the safety net program that many Ohioans need, but Ohio can take advantage of additional state options, simplify administrative barriers, and engage in more data collection to establish a stronger cash assistance program for Ohio's most vulnerable citizens.

### Introduction to TANF

With the shift from the AFDC to TANF in 1996, cash assistance to families living below the federal poverty level was no longer guaranteed to any eligible family. Instead, states are given a set federal funding amount each year through a block grant, regardless of level of statewide need, and must adjust statewide programs to fit within these funding limits.

The amount of funding provided in this block grant has been frozen since TANF's inception in 1996 and has lost 40 percent of its value due to inflation.<sup>1</sup> The yearly block grant amount Ohio

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<sup>1</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2021). (issue brief). Policy Basics: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/temporary-assistance-for-needy-families>

receives is set at \$725.6 million. In FY 2019, Ohio’s state maintenance of effort (MOE) contribution was \$457.7 million.<sup>2</sup>

The TANF program was created as a “welfare to work” program and was accompanied by (1) time limits any family could spend on the program, and (2) mandatory work requirements for eligible adults. Although the federal government sets the time limit that an eligible family can spend receiving TANF cash assistance at five years, Ohio has elected to set its limit at three years.

Ohio’s TANF cash assistance program is called Ohio Works First (OWF). To be eligible for cash assistance through OWF, there must be a child in the household, and a family’s gross income must be 50 percent of the federal poverty level or less. For a family of three in 2020, that’s just \$10,860 per year.

OWF’s initial income eligibility test is based on a family’s gross income before taxes or deductions. Gross income includes earned wages, unemployment compensation, social security payments, child support payments, veterans benefits and others. Dependent care costs that are not publicly funded, as well as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), can be deducted from a family’s gross income.<sup>3</sup> Resources such as a car or home are not considered in the income test.<sup>4</sup>

<b>Table 1: Ohio Works First Eligibility Level Per Family Size<sup>5</sup></b>	
<b>Household Size</b>	<b>Initial Monthly Income Eligibility Test</b>
1	\$532
2	\$719
3	\$905
4	\$1,092
5	\$1,279
6	\$1,465
7	\$1,652
8	\$1,839

Since the inception of the TANF program, cash assistance enrollment numbers have steadily declined, due to enrolled families reaching the end of the time limit on the program or not meeting the program or work requirements. In 2019, TANF reached only 23 out of every 100

<sup>2</sup> Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program Services Framework for SFY 2022-2023 (2021).

<sup>3</sup> Ohio Works First: Income and Eligibility, Rule 5101:1-23-20 (2017).  
<https://emanuals.jfs.ohio.gov/CashFoodAssist/CAM/Chapter2000/5101-1-23-20.stm>

<sup>4</sup> Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Ohio Works First Fact Sheet (2021).  
<https://jfs.ohio.gov/factsheets/OWF.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Cash/SNAP and Child Care Program Standards (2021).

families in poverty, down from reaching 68 out of every 100 families in poverty in 1996.<sup>6</sup> Nationwide, as of June 2020, only 1.1 million families were enrolled in TANF cash assistance, down from the historic peak of 5.1 million families who received assistance under the AFDC in March 1994.<sup>7</sup> This contrast is even more striking because despite the economic challenges brought on by the pandemic in 2020, June 2020 TANF enrollment marks the lowest point since the program's inception.

There are two kinds of TANF cash assistance cases, or households: adults and children, and child-only. An adult enrollee would be a parent who makes less than 50 percent of the federal poverty level and who, barring any circumstances that would exempt the individual, would have to meet work requirements to remain eligible for the full three years that Ohio offers.

Child-only enrollees are cases where an adult is not calculated in the family. In Ohio, most child-only cases are situations where the child is living with a family member, such as a grandparent. Because the adult family member is not the parent, the adult is ineligible, but the child's eligibility is based on their own income level. Child-only cases could also include families with adults with disabilities receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or families with citizen children and ineligible non-citizen parents.<sup>8</sup>

Notably, child-only families make up almost 83 percent of the OWF caseload.<sup>9</sup> Child-only cases are not required to meet work requirements and have no time limit, until the child ages out of the assistance program. In Ohio, the maximum age for a child-only recipient is 17 years old.<sup>10</sup> Ohio has the third highest number of child-only recipients in the nation, behind California and New York.<sup>11</sup> By number of child-only families, Ohio is second in the nation, behind only California, and outpacing New York.<sup>12</sup>

While on the program, adult OWF enrollees must meet program requirements, such as meeting work requirements or complying with the required self-sufficiency contract, or face sanctions. In Ohio, a sanctioned family can lose benefits for one month after the first sanction, three months after the second sanction and six months after the third sanction. When one adult or

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<sup>6</sup> Meyer, L., & Floyd, I. (2020). (issue brief). Policy Brief: Cash Assistance Should Reach Millions More Families to Lessen Hardship. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/cash-assistance-should-reach-millions-more-families-to-lessen-0>

<sup>7</sup> Congressional Research Service, The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: Responses to Frequently Asked Questions (2021). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32760.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Congressional Research Service, The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: Responses to Frequently Asked Questions (2021). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32760.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, TANF Caseload Data 2020 (2020). <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/data/tanf-caseload-data-2020>.

<sup>10</sup> Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database TANF Policy Tables, Table I.B.9. (2019). <https://wrds.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>

<sup>11</sup> Congressional Research Service, The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: Responses to Frequently Asked Questions (2021). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32760.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Administration for Children & Families, Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of TANF Recipients Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 (n.d.). [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy19\\_characteristics\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy19_characteristics_final.pdf).

guardian in the family does not meet OWF program requirements, OWF benefits are suspended for the entire family, including children, for the duration of the sanction.<sup>13</sup>

Designed to be a temporary support while families move into stable employment, TANF's work requirements are a central tenet of its "welfare to work" strategy; eligible adults must work 30 hours per week to satisfy work requirements. Across the nation, however, TANF cash assistance work programs have seldom helped families move into jobs that can lift them out of poverty.<sup>14</sup> With only about 10,000 of Ohio's cash assistance recipients being adults and an even smaller number of those adult recipients being required to satisfy work requirements, TANF is no longer a "welfare to work" program.

OWF also has a complicated application process that can last up to 30 days. An individual first applies online or fills out a paper form to mail, fax or return in-person to their county office. Verification documents such as proof of citizenship, Social Security card, birth certificate, proof of all income (including child support, disability, unemployment, etc.), utility bills, and rent or mortgage verification may be required, and additional documents can be requested throughout the review process.

Once the application is received, after an often-lengthy waiting period, a county representative contacts the applicant for an interview that can last up to 90 minutes and may be required to be in-person in some counties. The same caseworkers who process OWF applications can also be responsible for processing Medicaid and SNAP applications. At the end of the interview, the caseworker provides a list of additional documents needed to complete the application process. If applicants have questions throughout the process, the wait time for phone assistance can be as long as two hours in some counties. As a result of these long, complex application processes, OWF isn't a true safety net to help families who need immediate assistance.

Another TANF-funded program in Ohio is able to fill some, but not all, of the need for immediate assistance. Ohio's Prevention, Retention and Contingency (PRC) program is a diversion program that offers short-term help to families for emergent needs, such as car repairs, one-time rental assistance, home maintenance, and other expenses that might otherwise lead to a family falling deeper into poverty.<sup>15</sup> PRC payments are awarded by County Job and Family Services offices and can only be used for short-term, non-recurrent needs. Counties have broad flexibility in determining eligibility, award amounts, and criteria for PRC assistance, but available PRC funding in counties is not enough to meet the emergent needs of all eligible families, meaning that PRC, like OWF, is subject to resource constraints.

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<sup>13</sup> Ohio Works First: Three-Tier Sanctions, Rule 5101:1-3-15 (2018).

<https://emanuals.jfs.ohio.gov/CashFoodAssist/CAM/Chapter2000/5101-1-3-15.stm>

<sup>14</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2021). (issue brief). Policy Basics: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/temporary-assistance-for-needy-families>

<sup>15</sup> Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Fact Sheet: Prevention, Retention and Contingency (2021). <https://jfs.ohio.gov/factsheets/prc.pdf>

## Inequities in Cash Assistance Programs

Welfare reform is rooted in racist stereotypes of the “welfare queen.” Historically, the AFDC and its predecessor, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), worked to exclude Black families by authorizing assistance to “suitable homes” only, preventing assistance to families with out-of-wedlock pregnancies. ADC assistance also often ended during times when low-wage workers were in short supply in fields or homes, thus forcing mothers into the labor market.<sup>16</sup>

In Ohio, “man in the house” policies were implemented in Cuyahoga County under the ADC, which would stop aid to families if a man who was not a child’s father lived with the mother. These policies assumed the man, who may have had little income or had no legal responsibility to the child, would care for the family, and were implemented in neighborhoods with higher Black populations. In Cuyahoga County, unannounced home searches were authorized by the local ADC agencies to attempt to catch a man living in the home in order to stop aid.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, Ohio was one of a handful of states that considered proposals for compulsory sterilization of unmarried mothers who had additional children while receiving assistance, claiming that these mothers were trying to make a business of receiving additional assistance for additional children.<sup>18</sup>

In Ohio, distrust of low-income Ohioans and welfare recipients was evident as Ohio underwent welfare reform, and among other suspicion-driven policy choices, prompted the state legislature to prohibit time limit and work participation exemptions for victims of domestic violence due to beliefs that OWF recipients might use this option to avoid work.<sup>19</sup> Domestic violence hardship exemptions were later adopted in 2008.<sup>20</sup>

The long-term effects of these discriminatory policies are evident today. Black and Latino children are more likely to live in states with the fewest families enrolled in TANF per 100 families in poverty, and with the weakest TANF programs that have benefits below 20 percent

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<sup>16</sup> Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries. (2012, June 15). Aid for dependent children. Social Welfare History Project. <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/aid-for-dependent-children/>.

<sup>17</sup> Floyd, I., Pavetti, L., Meyer, L., Safawi, A., Schott, L., Bellew, E., & Magnus, A. (2021). (rep.). TANF Policies Reflect Racist Legacy of Cash Assistance. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-policies-reflect-racist-legacy-of-cash-assistance>

<sup>18</sup> Floyd, I., Pavetti, L., Meyer, L., Safawi, A., Schott, L., Bellew, E., & Magnus, A. (2021). (rep.). TANF Policies Reflect Racist Legacy of Cash Assistance. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-policies-reflect-racist-legacy-of-cash-assistance>

<sup>19</sup> Corlett, J. (2006). (rep.). The Allocation Of TANF And Child Care Funding In Ohio (pp. 5, 28). Cleveland, Ohio: The Center for Community Solutions.

<sup>20</sup> Frech, R. (2016). (rep.). Ohio Works First Hardship Exemptions An Underutilized Tool to Extend Benefits to Families in Need. Cleveland, Ohio: The Center for Community Solutions.

of the federal poverty level.<sup>21</sup> Black and Latino families are also more likely to face work sanctions for noncompliance than white families.<sup>22</sup>

In Ohio, Black recipients are overrepresented in Ohio Works First. Although Black Ohioans account for only 12 percent on the state's population, 38 percent of Ohio Works First recipients are Black.<sup>23</sup>

## State Options

Unlike many other public benefits programs, there are no federal minimum requirements for TANF cash assistance eligibility, and there is limited federal guidance on eligibility overall. Each state has significant control over the requirements, structure and assistance levels of their state TANF cash assistance program. Although two of the four goals of TANF use the word “needy,” there is no federal definition of what it means to be “needy,” meaning states have the flexibility to determine eligibility for their state TANF cash assistance program.

The major constraint on these flexibilities is a limitation on the resources available to do so due to the set block grant amount states receive each year. States can, however, choose to invest more state funding through their MOE to expand eligibility and time limits for TANF cash assistance. Because child-only cases have no time limits on the program until the child comes of age, only recipient families with adults are subject to OWF time limits.

Notably, some of the options available to states are positive implementations that would enhance the effectiveness of the cash assistance program in bringing families out of poverty. Other options would create barriers to families enrolling in cash assistance or serve as a deterrent to enrollment in the first place, which is harmful to children and families in need. Many of these state options are rooted in the racist and prejudiced rhetoric from 1996, at the time of welfare reform, such as options for drug testing, school attendance requirements, family caps, and health screenings.

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<sup>21</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2021). (issue brief). Policy Basics: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/temporary-assistance-for-needy-families>

<sup>22</sup> Minoff, E. (2020). (rep.). The Racist Roots of Work Requirements. Center for the Study of Social Policy. Retrieved from <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Racist-Roots-of-Work-Requirements-CSSP-1.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Administration for Children & Families, Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of TANF Recipients Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 (n.d.). [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy19\\_characteristics\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy19_characteristics_final.pdf)

Table 2: Federal Options Available to States	
Category	Options
Behavioral Requirements	School Requirements: Minimum Attendance or GPA
	Immunization/Health Screening Requirements
	Drug Testing (Allowed only with reasonable suspicion)
Financial Policy	Benefit Levels: Monthly Payment Amounts
	Eligibility Tests: Gross vs. Net Income Limits
	Eligibility: Earnings Excluded from Income Tests
	Eligibility: Asset Tests and Excluded Assets
Eligibility Exclusions	Family Cap: Excludes benefits for a child conceived while mother is receiving benefits
	Drug Felon Bar: Set in Federal Law. States can opt-out
	Immigrant Bar: Immigrants are ineligible for federal cash assistance for 5 years. States can use MOE funds.
Work Requirements	Noncompliance Sanctions: Full Family Sanctions - prevent the entire family from receiving cash assistance if an adult in the household does not meet work requirements
	Exemptions: When ill, incapacitated, pregnant, caretaker, etc.
	Eligible Work Activities: Counting Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Treatment, etc.
Enrollment and Retention	Clarity of Notices
	Requiring Evidence of Job Search When Applying
Time Limits	Federal Funds: Up to 60 Months
	State MOE: No Time Limit
	Extensions: Adds additional time past the time limit
	Exemption: Stops the clock and allows an individual to receive benefits under special circumstances without accruing time towards limit

Table 3: Ohio's TANF Options: What We Do Well	
Option	Current Ohio Policy
Eligibility: Asset Test	No asset test is included in eligibility
Behavioral Requirements	Ohio has no school attendance or GPA requirements, and no immunization or health screening requirements <sup>24</sup>
Eligibility Exclusions: Family Cap	Ohio has no family cap
Enrollment: Job search requirement	Ohio has no requirement that an applicant is job searching when he or she applies <sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database TANF Policy Tables, Table III.A.1. (2019). <https://wrd.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>

<sup>25</sup> Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database TANF Policy Tables, Table I.A.2. (2019). <https://wrd.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>

Table 4: Ohio's TANF Options: What We Can Do Better	
Option	Current Ohio Policy
Income Eligibility	Gross Income must be no more than 50% FPL ➤ To improve: Consider net income, raise income limit
Time Limits	Ohio's time limit: 36 months ➤ To improve: Expand to federal time limit of 60 months
Eligibility: Pregnant Mothers	Father is not eligible until child is born. Mother is eligible starting only in the 6 <sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy <sup>26</sup> ➤ To improve: Allow access to benefits earlier in pregnancy
Eligibility: Noncitizens	Ohio does not provide state-funded cash assistance to lawful permanent residents or battered noncitizens for the 5 years of initial ineligibility for federal TANF assistance. <sup>27</sup> ➤ To improve: Use MOE funds to assist noncitizens
Eligibility: Earned Income Disregards	Ohio does not exclude any earned income from income eligibility tests. <sup>28</sup> The formula for determining monthly payment amounts does include an earned income disregard. ➤ To improve: Exclude a portion of earned income in eligibility tests
Work Requirement Exemptions	Ohio has no exemption from work requirements for the head of household due to being ill or incapacitated, pregnant, elderly, or being a caretaker for a child older than 12 months. <sup>29</sup> ➤ To improve: Allow additional work exemptions
Work Requirement Noncompliance Sanctions	Ohio suspends the entire benefit amount for one month after the first sanction, three months after the second sanction and six months after the third sanction, or until compliance, whichever is longer. <sup>30</sup> ➤ To improve: Suspend only a portion of benefit amount
Sanctions: Full family sanctions	In event of work requirement noncompliance, Ohio suspends benefits for the entire assistance unit. <sup>31</sup> ➤ To improve: Suspend for only the noncompliant adult
Time Limit Exemption: Stop the Accrual of Time	Ohio does not have time limit exemption policies for heads of household who are working and earning income, unable to find employment, are ill, incapacitated, or have a disability, are caring for another person who is ill, incapacitated or has a disability, are caring

<sup>26</sup> Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database TANF Policy Tables, Table I.B.1. (2019).

<https://wrd.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>

<sup>27</sup> Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database TANF Policy Tables, Table I.B.6. (2019).

<https://wrd.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>

<sup>28</sup> Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database TANF Policy Tables, Table I.E.2. (2019).

<https://wrd.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>

<sup>29</sup> Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database TANF Policy Tables, Table III.B.1. (2019).

<https://wrd.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>

<sup>30</sup> Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database TANF Policy Tables, Table III.B.3. (2019).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ohio Works First: Three-Tier Sanctions, Rule 5101:1-3-15 (2018).

<https://emanuals.ifs.ohio.gov/CashFoodAssist/CAM/Chapter2000/5101-1-3-15.stm>

	<p>for a child, is pregnant, is a minor parent, is a victim of domestic violence, or is elderly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To improve: Incorporate additional exemptions</li> </ul>
Time Limit Extension: Receive Benefits Past 36 Months	<p>Ohio does not have time limit extension policies for heads of household who are working and earning income, unable to find employment, are ill, incapacitated, or have a disability, are caring for another person who is ill, incapacitated or has a disability, are caring for a child, is pregnant, is a minor parent, or is elderly. Ohio does have a state time limit extension policy for heads of household who are victims of domestic violence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To improve: Incorporate additional extensions</li> </ul>

In FY 2019, 28,853 Ohioans were removed from OWF caseloads.<sup>32</sup> Of these, 17.7 percent (about 5,107 people) were removed because of work sanctions. Ohio offers very few work exemptions when OWF recipients are pregnant, elderly, caring for a dependent, or ill or incapacitated. Ohio can expand on available work requirement exemptions to decrease the number of recipients facing program disenrollment due to work sanctions.

There are two types of extensions beyond Ohio’s 36-month time limit. The first is state hardship, through which a county agency can exempt up to 20 percent of its caseload if it’s determined that the time limit is a hardship. A state hardship extension can only be awarded if the recipient has already exhausted 36 months on OWF.<sup>33</sup> Because Ohio is a county-administered state, each county develops their own policies and procedures regarding hardship extensions, and two people with identical circumstances might be granted an extension in one county and denied an extension in another.<sup>34</sup> There is no limit on how long a county can extend benefits under a hardship extension, and no formal process for oversight of these cases.<sup>35</sup>

The 20 percent limit on the number of caseloads that can receive a hardship extension in any one county only applies to cases subject to time limits. Child-only cases, which are not subject to time limits on the program, are not eligible for hardship extensions.<sup>36</sup>

A good cause extension can be awarded after an individual has exhausted 36 months on OWF and waited a 24-month period of ineligibility. This extension can provide additional time to recipients to overcome barriers to self-sufficiency, such as losing employment, divorce,

<sup>32</sup> Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). (rep.). Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of TANF Recipients Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. Retrieved from

[https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy19\\_characteristics\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy19_characteristics_final.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Ohio Works First: Time-Limited Receipt of Assistance, Rule 5101:1-23-01 (2017).

<https://emanuals.ifs.ohio.gov/CashFoodAssist/CAM/Chapter2000/5101-1-23-01.stm>

<sup>34</sup> Britton, T., & Luscheck, B. (2018). (rep.). Majority of Ohioans living in deep poverty don't receive cash assistance. The Center for Community Solutions. Retrieved from <https://www.communitysolutions.com/research/temporary-assistance-needy-families-ohio-balancing-program-integrity-entitlement-reducing-poverty-not-goal/>

<sup>35</sup> Frech, R. (2016). (rep.). Ohio Works First Hardship Exemptions An Underutilized Tool to Extend Benefits to Families in Need. Cleveland, Ohio: The Center for Community Solutions.

<sup>36</sup> Frech, R. (2016). (rep.). Ohio Works First Hardship Exemptions An Underutilized Tool to Extend Benefits to Families in Need. Cleveland, Ohio: The Center for Community Solutions.

domestic violence, unique personal circumstances, or any other reason determined to be good cause by the county agency.<sup>37</sup>

Good cause extensions are not capped to 20 percent of caseloads, but extensions are still subject to the 60-month federal time limit, meaning a recipient can only be awarded a good cause extension of up to 24 months in Ohio.

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Reached Federal Time Limit	1.3%
Reached State Time Limit	5.6%
Work-Related Sanction	17.7%
Other Sanction ( <i>such as failure to comply with child support requirements, development of individual responsibility plan, teen parent requirement to live in a supervised adult setting</i> )	6.4%
Exceeded Income or Resources	0.4%
Failure to Comply ( <i>such as failure to appear at eligibility appointment, submit required verification materials, or cooperate with eligibility requirements</i> )	6.7%
Voluntary Closure	10.8%
Other ( <i>such as loss of eligibility when the youngest child is too old to qualify for assistance, a case is transferred to a separate state MOE program, or other reason</i> )	51.1%
Employment	0.0%
Marriage	0.0%

Notably, no OWF recipients left the program due to gaining employment, and only 0.4 percent of recipients left the program after exceeding the income or resource limit for program eligibility. Overall, 37.7 percent of recipients who were removed from caseloads were removed because of failure to comply, sanctions, or reaching time limits.

## Conclusion

In counties with high poverty rates and low OWF enrollment, most of which are rural counties, it's possible that not all eligible recipients are aware of the program. Some of the lower caseloads seen in counties with higher poverty rates could be due to eligible recipients already receiving the maximum number of months of cash assistance, but the Ohio Works First program name isn't an obvious description of what the program can offer, and lack of awareness could also be a contributor to low caseloads.

<sup>37</sup> Ohio Works First: Time-Limited Receipt of Assistance, Rule 5101:1-23-01 (2017).

<https://emanuals.ifs.ohio.gov/CashFoodAssist/CAM/Chapter2000/5101-1-23-01.stm>

<sup>38</sup> Administration for Children and Families. (n.d.). (rep.). Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of TANF Recipients Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. Retrieved from

[https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy19\\_characteristics\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/fy19_characteristics_final.pdf)

While we have a partial picture of the impact OWF has on Ohioans, the state doesn't collect data on work or success outcomes after a family leaves the program. Data on the number of recipients who are granted extensions or individuals sanctioned are not readily available.<sup>39</sup> Work participation rates by county and data on the type of programs OWF recipients participate in are also vital, but largely unavailable. In 2018, Community Solutions [previously noted](#) the importance of more comprehensive data on the Ohio Works First program, and little has changed in statewide reporting since then, although a recent addition in the state budget (House Bill 110) does require more robust reporting of TANF funding in the state.

Ohio could also report more detailed information on why Ohioans are removed from the OWF program. Data from the Administration of Children and Families reports that 50 percent of households removed from OWF rolls in 2019 were removed due to "other" reasons. Learning why Ohioans are removed, or why they are denied OWF benefits in the first place, would allow for targeted outreach to help eligible individuals enroll.

With the many flexibilities in work and behavioral requirements, sanctions, exemptions and extensions, the state lacks consistency in how cases are handled. Each County Department of Job and Family Services could handle the same situation differently. In many cases, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services doesn't collect data on which counties are actually utilizing the full flexibilities offered through TANF to help families stay on the program or the rates at which extensions and exemptions are offered in each county.

Ohio could invest more in work supports and other supportive services to help residents overcome barriers to work, such as helping to cover the costs of transportation, mental health services, domestic violence services, or substance use disorder treatment. OWF enrollees are categorically eligible for child care subsidies, but additional work supports should be offered. Ohio should take advantage of the full flexibility offered by the federal government in designing work, training and engagement programs that address barriers to work and put parents on a path for a livable wage and long-term career, including ensuring that every county allows mental health and substance use disorder treatment to count towards work hours.

Vulnerable Ohioans enroll in Ohio Works First for short-term income support. However, without taking full advantage of the numerous opportunities for state flexibility, Ohio is adding more barriers for families to face when trying to rise out of poverty. The opportunities laid out in this report would help Ohio Works First become a responsive, inclusive safety net program for Ohioans who need it most.

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<sup>39</sup> Reports on Receipt of Benefits While Under Hardship are available on the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services website through June 2018. No reports on the number of individuals awarded hardship extensions are available since June 2018. <https://jfs.ohio.gov/ofs/DMRS/hardship.stm>



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