



Department for Children and Families

Economic Services Division

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Agency of Human Services

December 23, 2009

Ann Barbagallo, Acting Director, Office of Family Assistance
Office of Family Assistance
Administration for Children and Families
Fifth Floor East
370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW
Washington, DC 20447

Dear Ms. Barbagallo:

In accordance with federal law and regulations, I am pleased to submit Vermont's amended renewal plan for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. The period of this renewal is from October 1, 2009 through December 31, 2012.

With this plan renewal I am enclosing the necessary attachments and certifications from Governor James Douglas.

Should any questions arise in your review of this plan, you may contact a member of my staff, Paula J. Gottwik. (Tel: 802-241-2887; Fax: 802-241-3934; E-mail: Paula.Gottwik@ahs.state.vt.us).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Patrissi".

Joseph Patrissi
Deputy Commissioner

Enclosures

cc: Mary Ann Higgins, Regional Administrator
Acting TANF Manager
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
JFK Government Center, Room 2025
Boston, MA. 02203

STATE OF VERMONT
Vermont TANF State Plan Renewal

For The Period October 1, 2009 through December 31, 2012

In fulfillment of the state plan requirements of Section 402 (a) of the Social Security Act, Vermont submits this state plan to renew its status as an eligible state. The plan renewal is a continuation of the state plan initially submitted September 20, 1996, renewed October 1, 1998, October 1, 2001, October 1, 2003, October 1, 2006 and with subsequent amendments.

This renewal is being submitted to the Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services, through the Director, Administration for Children and Families, Washington, DC, in December, 2009.

Vermont operates a program to serve the broad purposes of title IV-A of the Social Security Act—Block Grants to States for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Vermont's family assistance grant is used to provide temporary assistance to needy families and to otherwise fulfill federal and state requirements to strengthen families by helping them to become self-sufficient through employment.

On July 1, 2001, Vermont implemented Reach Up, its TANF program. The Reach Up Program is administered by the Department for Children and Families' (DCF) Economic Services Division (ESD), formerly the Department of Prevention, Assistance, Transition, and Health Access (PATH) and provides transitional assistance and support services to needy families with (or expecting) children. The program operates on a statewide basis on the basic principle that there are reciprocal responsibilities and obligations on the part of both program participants and the government. Financial eligibility for the program is determined by income and resource limits (see chart – Attachment C).

The Reach Up Program has two components: the financial assistance component and the services component. Adults in participating families who are receiving financial assistance must participate in the services component. Adult participants who can work are required to engage in work or work activities. Using a case management model, the department provides eligible families with support services and opportunities designed to address the families' needs that are related to gaining and maintaining unsubsidized employment and moving the family toward self-sufficiency.

Additionally, the department's TANF program authorizes emergency assistance (EA) for essential needs the family is unable to meet due to a catastrophic situation or circumstances in which a family not receiving Reach Up has income below the applicable income level, has exhausted its income and resources, and has an emergency need.

Vermont continues to exercise its option under section 408, paragraphs (a)(10)(A) and (B), of the Act to continue payment of TANF financial assistance benefits for a minor child absent from the home for at least 30 but not more than 180 consecutive days. The department may authorize

good cause exceptions to this restriction on the use of TANF funds for a minor child absent from the home.

This document is structured according to the organization of the language in the Social Security Act that describes the requirements of TANF state plans. The headings in bold are headings from section 402 of the Social Security Act (the Act).

(a)(1) OUTLINE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM-

(A) GENERAL PROVISIONS

This plan provides an outline of how the State intends to do the following:

(i) Conduct a program, designed to serve all political subdivisions in the State (not necessarily in a uniform manner), that provides assistance to needy families with (or expecting) children and provides parents with job preparation, work, and support services to enable them to leave the program and become self-sufficient.

Public Involvement

Submission of this state plan renewal commits Vermont to continued operation of its TANF program, Reach Up, as well as child care assistance for children younger than 13, in accordance with written rules. These rules are established in compliance with Vermont's Administrative Procedure Act (3 V.S.A. Chapter 25) which defines the rule-making process, and requires public notice and comment on proposed regulations and rules changes. As a result of the rulemaking process used to formalize all state TANF policies into regulations, Vermont satisfies public notice requirements of section 402 of the Act. In developing and modifying the Reach Up Program, Vermont engages the broadest possible spectrum of interested parties in formulating the program and provides the 45 days' notice for comments on the plan, as required by the Act. Changes in state policy subsequent to adoption of this state plan are made through the rule-making process prescribed by state law.

Outline of Reach Up Program's General Provisions

Application

Applicants in families with two parents who are able to work are referred to the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) for immediate job search. Other applicants who are able to work and have a recent work history in positions paying over 150 percent of the federal poverty level are also referred for immediate job search. Applicants who fail to follow through on a referral to VDOL are denied financial assistance for their families. All other applicants, including those participants who were referred to VDOL and failed to obtain a job, are assessed to determine their abilities and limitations in regard to securing unsubsidized employment.

Assessment

All participants must cooperate in an initial assessment and, if appropriate or necessary, reassessments. The assessment may include tests, standardized evaluations, and referrals to professionals for evaluation or diagnosis. Using the assessment results, each adult participant sets an employment goal to obtain unsubsidized employment. With the help of the case manager, the participant develops a plan for achieving the goal within 12 months of when the participant is able to meet the work requirement by participating in TANF-approved work activities (work-ready).

While the program presumes that all new participants are work-ready, those who are assessed to have barriers are allowed up to 12 cumulative months of participation in the program to overcome their barriers and become work-ready. All participants must meet their employment goal and obtain unsubsidized employment before they have received more than 24 cumulative months of Reach Up financial assistance.

Case Management

The Reach Up Program uses a case management model to provide services to participating families. A case manager is assigned to each participating family as soon as the family begins to receive financial assistance. Using case management, the department provides participating families with services, including assessment, information, referrals, and assistance in the preparation and implementation of a family development plan (FDP), with the goal of helping the family achieve self-sufficiency. ESD contracts with entities with special expertise to provide case management services to teenage parents and participants with significant barriers to obtaining employment.

Family Development Plans

Every participating family must have a family development plan (FDP). The FDP charts and documents each family's participation in the Reach Up services component. The FDP sets forth each adult participant's employment goal, the plan and schedule of activities the participant must engage in to attain the goal, and the specific FDP requirements the participant must fulfill to avoid sanctions. Development of the FDP begins when a family applies for Reach Up financial assistance.

Support Services to Participating Families

Support services are services needed by the family to overcome limitations and barriers to obtaining and maintaining unsubsidized employment and to improve the participant's prospects for job placement and retention. The department determines the full range of support services needed by each family and includes the service plan in the FDP. Some support services are provided directly by the department, and others are provided by other entities.

The department exercises its authority under this plan to enter into contractual agreements with community-based organizations to provide job preparation, work, and support services consistent with the goals of the program. Examples of support services include child care, transportation, career counseling, job search assistance, vocational rehabilitation, homelessness prevention and housing assistance. Services must be identified in the FDP and determined by the commissioner to be necessary and appropriate to achieve the purposes of the Reach Up Program. Specific services provided are explained in more detail in the latter part of this section.

Special Requirements for Minor Parents and Out-of-School Youths

All minor parents must participate in their FDP activities at all times. The minor parent shall take part in case-managed support, education, and training activities. The minor parent shall attend school or an appropriate alternative education or training program. If the minor parent is not emancipated in accordance with Vermont law (12 V.S.A. §7151), the minor parent and the dependent children in the minor parent's care must reside with a parent or in an approved living arrangement.

Youths (i.e., dependent children) 16 or 17 years old who are not attending school fulltime are also required to participate in the services component.

Work Requirements

All participating adults, unless granted a deferral of their work requirement, shall be required to fulfill their work requirement when they are work-ready. The number of hours the participant must work or engage in work activities depends on the configuration of the family.

Work Activities

Reach Up program rules define the work activities that a participant may engage in to meet the participant's work requirement. Following the publication of the Department of Health and Humans Services' (HHS) interim final TANF rules implementing the statutory changes enacted in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), the department amended the Reach Up work activity rules to define individual work activities consistent with new federal definitions. These changes were effective December 1, 2006. [Attachment D].

Alternate Work Requirement for Participants Under 20 Years Old

Adult participants who are under 20 years old are deemed to be meeting their work requirement if they meet at least one of the following criteria. Either they must maintain satisfactory attendance at a secondary school or the equivalent; or they must participate in education directly related to employment for at least 20 hours per week.

Deferments and Modifications

Under specified circumstances, the department may defer or modify the work requirement of a Reach Up participant who would otherwise be required to fulfill a work requirement. A deferment delays the onset of the full work requirement. A modification changes the number of hours of the participant's work requirement.

Work Requirement Hours

Work-ready participants and participants who have completed the FDP activities leading to their employment goal have a specified number of hours that they must work or engage in work activities to satisfy the work requirement. The number of hours of a participant's work requirement varies depending upon family configuration and specified family characteristics as illustrated in the following chart.

Type of Family	Ability to Work	Parent	Work Requirement
Two parents	Both able-to-work	Principal earner parent (PEP)	40 hours per week, or 35 hours per week in a job the employer defines as full-time
		Primary caretaker of child	None unless the PEP is sanctioned, then the primary caretaker must fulfill the PEP's work requirement
		Both parents	40 hours per week divided between parents sharing work requirement
	One able-to-work and one able-to-work-part-time or unable-to-work	Parent able-to-work	30 hours per week
		Parent able-to-work-part-time	None
		Parent unable-to-work	None
	One able-to-work-part-time at least 30 hours per week and one able-to-work-part-time or unable-to-work	Parent able-to-work-part-time at least 30 hours per week	30 hours per week
		Parent #2 able-to-work-part-time	None
		Parent unable-to-work	None
	Both parents able-to-work-part-time	Both parents	30 hours per week combined or the combined number of hours they are able-to-work-part-time, whichever is less
	One able-to-work-part-time and one unable-to-work	Parent able-to-work-part-time	30 hours per week or the number of hours the parent is able-to-work-part-time, whichever is less
		Parent unable-to-work	None
Both parents unable-to-work	Both parents	None	
Single parent or caretaker with child under 6	Parent or caretaker able-to-work		20 hours per week
	Parent or caretaker able-to-work-part-time		20 hours per week or the number of hours the parent is able-to-work-part-time, whichever is less
	Parent unable-to-work		None
Single parent or caretaker with child 6 or older	Parent or caretaker able-to-work		30 hours per week
	Parent or caretaker able-to-work-part-time		30 hours per week or the number of hours the parent is able-to-work-part-time, whichever is less
	Parent unable-to-work		None

Noncompliance and Good Cause

Reach Up participants must comply with all services component requirements, including the work requirement. Noncompliance may result in sanctions. The department will excuse noncompliance supported by good cause.

Sanctions for Noncompliance with Services Component Requirements

If a participating adult, including a minor parent, fails to comply with services component requirements, the department shall impose a fiscal sanction by reducing the financial assistance grant of the sanctioned adult's family. Minor parents' grants are not funded with TANF funds during periods of non-compliance with TANF requirements. Sanctions and consequences for out-of-school youths or adult applicants who fail to report to VDOL differ from sanctions for noncompliance with services component requirements. Out-of-school youths who fail to comply with program requirements shall have the monetary amount designated to cover their needs removed from the family's grant. Families of adult applicants who fail to report to VDOL as directed are denied financial assistance.

Incentives and Disregards

The department may offer incentive payments and income disregards to encourage participants to achieve goals required by their FDPs. Income disregards are provided to families who are receiving income from employment. ESD also offers incentive payments for participants to complete specified tasks leading to achievement of an FDP requirement, such as improvement of parenting skills, participation in secondary education by teen parents, and as an incentive to maintain employment.

Transportation

- **Good News Garage**
In a contract with a charitable organization, the department agrees to pay a negotiated flat fee for repairs on donated vehicles. After the vehicles are repaired, they are provided to Reach Up participants who need a vehicle to begin or maintain employment.
- **The Reach Up Program** has expanded its continuum of transportation to rural families by launching a program that helps Reach Up participants earning wages to purchase and finance good quality used cars. The program offers car and finance brokering services. The program works directly with Reach Up participants to help them select a quality vehicle and negotiate an affordable loan package.
- **Ready to Go**
ESD contracts with a charitable organization to provide on demand transportation for Reach Up participants to go to work or to other approved activities in their Family Development Plan.

- **Medicaid Transportation System**
Reach Up utilizes the Medicaid Transportation System's infrastructure to access buses, taxi cabs and volunteer drivers to transport participants to non-medical approved activities in their Family Development Plan.

Housing

ESD contracts with organizations to provide short-term housing for homeless families, case management services that provide intervention for families at risk of losing their home, and assistance locating a place to live for those who have lost their home.

Group Work Sites

ESD partially funds group work sites in government or public nonprofit organizations for placement of Reach Up participants. These work sites may provide subsidized employment placements, community service placements and work experience placements. Several of the placements are with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Vermont; the state provides the organization with funds to support supervision of Reach Up participants as part of the mutual agreement that allows Vermont to claim some of the organization's expenditures for TANF eligible activities and families.

Child Care

The Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families establishes the standards for child care eligibility. Eligible families include families receiving financial assistance in the Reach Up Program, transitioning off the program, or at risk of becoming dependent on financial assistance. State expenditures for child care are designated as qualified state expenditures and applied toward Vermont's maintenance-of-effort requirements for TANF. To support working parents during the crucial afterschool hours, children and teens are provided with afterschool care and programs at Boys and Girls Clubs throughout the state in accordance with a memorandum of understanding between the state and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Vermont.

Separate State Programs

Separate State Programs are programs funded with state general funds that are counted towards Vermont's TANF Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirement.

The Reach Up Separate State Program Component

This program is structured to pay financial assistance with appropriated state maintenance-of-effort funds to families in which the parent or caretaker is engaged in unsubsidized employment or other combination of work activities for the number of hours that meets the applicable TANF participation rate requirement. The purpose of the separate state program is to preserve

eligibility for TANF-funded assistance to working Reach Up families by providing them with work supports and financial assistance funded with state maintenance-of-effort (MOE) funds. The component is operational only when there are sufficient general funds. Other than the qualifying criteria for this program, this component operates under the same rules for participation and eligibility as the standard Reach Up Program.

Reach Ahead

Reach Ahead is a separate state financial assistance program supported with state maintenance-of-effort (MOE) funds. The purpose of Reach Ahead is to reduce and prevent the financial dependency of needy families on government benefits, improve families' financial stability while transitioning off of public assistance, and reduce recidivism into the ongoing financial assistance program. The program provides financial assistance and services to families who have recently (within 6 months) left the Reach Up or the Postsecondary Education (PSE) financial assistance programs.

Eligible families receive \$100 of financial assistance each month for the first six months and \$50 each month for the seventh through twelfth month of Reach Ahead participation. Families can purchase only food with the Reach Ahead benefit. To be eligible for Reach Ahead in addition to having financially qualified and participated in Reach Up or Vermont's Postsecondary Education Program (PSE), which has the same financial eligibility criteria as Reach Up, a family must:

1. seek enrollment in Reach Ahead within six months of leaving Reach Up or PSE;
2. include a work-eligible adult who is meeting the applicable TANF work requirement through paid employment;
3. include a minor child; and
4. meet all other the Reach Up requirements such as residency, family composition and verification of income.

Other Related Programs

Emergency Assistance

The department's TANF program authorizes emergency assistance (previously referred to as ANFC-EA) for essential needs the family is unable to meet due to a catastrophic situation or circumstances in which the family's income and resources are exhausted. This program is funded with TANF funds and State MOE. Vermont preserves its authority (Title IV-A, section 404(a)(2) of the Social Security Act) to continue activities under the former ANFC-EA plan in effect as of September 30, 1995. Any activities Vermont engages in under this grandfather authority are funded with segregated TANF funds.

Vermont provides families with dependent children TANF-funded Emergency Assistance (EA) benefits to address specific short-term (not to exceed 4 months) crisis need that the family could not have avoided and that cannot be met without the department's intervention.

A family may qualify for EA in one of two ways, by meeting either the non-catastrophic or the catastrophic rules.

Non-catastrophic eligibility criteria include:

1. The applicant family includes a dependent child in the household;
2. the family has applied any available resources toward meeting the emergency need; a family with resources in excess of the emergency need is not eligible for EA; and
3. the family's income is less than the Reach Up payment standard for a family of comparable size with the same housing costs.

Catastrophic eligibility criteria include:

1. The applicant family includes a dependent child in the household;
2. the family experienced a catastrophic situation such as natural disasters, death of a spouse or child, medical emergency and constructive evictions (including domestic violence); and
3. the family has exhausted all income and resources.

Benefits issued under the EA program include: vendor payments for housing costs up to a maximum, back rent and mortgage arrears that will prevent homelessness, payment of utility bills, minimum heating fuel delivery, and cash benefit for food and personal needs.

Job Retention and Enhancement Services

Reach Up participants who obtain paid employment are eligible to receive job retention and enhancement services. Participants who are no longer eligible for Reach Up financial assistance continue to be eligible for these services for up to six months following grant closure. The services provided may include coaching and encouragement, referrals to community resources, education and training, and the range of support services provided to Reach Up participants who are meeting their work requirement through paid employment during their employment phase.

Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit is designed to address the income gap experienced by low-income earners and to promote work by providing needy working families with children tax credits that are refunded to the families in excess of any refunded overpayment of tax liability. The income eligibility for this state EITC is the same as for the federal EITC. The family must include a minor child to qualify for the program. This program is funded with TANF funds.

Reach First – Vermont's Diversion Program

Families who file a new application for assistance because they are experiencing a financial crisis may choose to participate in Vermont's diversion program, Reach First. Reach First is a

TANF-funded program that provides families with case management, financial help, and support services to address a discrete and short-term need that can be resolved within a four-month period. A cash benefit may be provided in a lump sum or in payments, based on the family's needs. The purpose of the program is to assist the family to overcome a temporary and short-term crisis and avoid the need for ongoing basic assistance.

Financial and non-financial eligibility criteria for Reach First are the same as for Vermont's Reach Up program, except that the family's income from child support, after disregard of the first fifty dollars received in a month, is counted as unearned income in determining eligibility and potential benefits.

Families who have not participated in Reach First in the past 12 months may choose to participate in the program after they have been oriented to the program participation requirements, benefits, and other programs available to them. Program benefits and services are provided to Reach First families based on need. Reach First families who do not have a documented and certain plan for self-sufficiency within the four-month Reach First certification period must cooperate with assessment activities and referrals to ensure that Reach First is an appropriate program for them and that supports are in place to achieve program goals. At any point when the family is determined to be inappropriate for Reach First, the family will be advised of alternatives and assisted to transfer or participate in an alternative program.

(a)(1)(A)(ii) Require a parent or caretaker receiving assistance under the program to engage in work (as defined by the State) once the State determines the parent or caretaker is ready to engage in work, or once the parent or caretaker has received assistance under the program for 24 months (whether or not consecutive), whichever is earlier.

Vermont requires a parent or caretaker receiving assistance to engage in work according to the provisions of Vermont's welfare law, 33 V.S.A. § 1101 - 1134, and applicable Reach Up Program rules. Parents and caretakers receiving assistance are assessed for their ability to engage in employment or TANF work activities (work readiness) when they become program participants. Work-ready participants must engage in approved work activities at a level sufficient to meet their work requirement. Within no more than 12 months from the participant's work-ready date, the participant must have unsubsidized employment, provided such employment is available.

When a Reach Up Program participant refuses to engage in work without good cause the participant's family grant is reduced. The first three months the grant is reduced by \$75 for each month of non-compliance. If the participant continues to refuse to engage in work for more than three months, the family's grant is reduced by \$150 per month. When a participant has had 12 or more cumulative months of sanctions and has received 60 or more cumulative months of Reach Up financial assistance, the family's grant is reduced by \$225 per month for each month of non-compliance.

All reductions in the family grant for a participant's failure to engage in work are per participant. If at any time there are two parents in the family who have work requirements and refuse to engage in work, the family's grant is reduced for each parent's act of noncompliance. Participants who are subject to financial sanctions must meet with their case manager at least once a month. A parent's failure, without good cause, to keep an appointment with the case manager when the family grant is being reduced due to a refusal to engage in work may result in termination of financial assistance to the family.

(a)(1)(A)(iii) Ensure that parents and caretakers receiving assistance under the program engage in work activities in accordance with section 407.

Reach Up provides eligible parents with an opportunity to plan for and achieve a future independent of government assistance. Caseworkers help participants define employment goals based on individualized assessments of their needs and strengths. The Family Development Plan (FDP) specifies the participant's employment goal, steps and services needed to achieve the goal, and target dates for completion. The FDP also defines support services for which the department will pay, including child care and transportation. With the FDP in place, the caseworker helps the Reach Up participant to carry out the plan and monitors his or her progress throughout the service delivery phase, modifying the plan as necessary. Able-bodied adult family members must begin participating in work activities as soon as their assessment is complete.

Participation in the Reach Up Program's services component is mandatory for all participants in the program. Every family with able-bodied adults has program requirements that eventually lead to at least one adult fulfilling a work requirement through unsubsidized employment and meeting an employment goal. Minor parents who have not completed their education may meet their work requirement by participating in a school program. When Reach Up eligibility ends due to earnings from unsubsidized employment, Reach Up services to support job maintenance and enhancement may be extended for up to six months from the date of grant closure.

(a)(1)(A)(iv) Take such reasonable steps as the State deems necessary to restrict the use and disclosure of information about individuals and families receiving assistance under the program attributable to funds provided by the Federal Government.

It is the department's policy and practice that all client information be kept strictly confidential. Vermont law (33 V.S.A. §2551) prohibits the disclosure of names or information pertaining to applicants for or recipients of assistance, benefits, or social services, and further prohibits use of department records for political or commercial purposes. Department staff may disclose information about clients only for purposes directly related to program administration or under the following conditions:

- when the client specifically asks a third party to intervene on his or her behalf,
- when the client specifically consents to releasing information to a third party,
- when a law enforcement officer requests the current address of a recipient who is a fugitive felon, or
- when a report of abuse is required by law.

(a)(1)(A)(v) Establish goals and take action to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, with special emphasis on teenage pregnancies, and establish numerical goals for reducing the illegitimacy ratio of the State (as defined in section 403(a)(2)(C)(iii)) for calendar years 1996 through 2005.

In Vermont, the illegitimacy ratio for teenagers is considerably higher than the illegitimacy ratio for the general population. In 1996, the illegitimacy ratio for teens was 85 percent while the illegitimacy ratio for the general population was 26 percent. Within the teen population, teens under 18 have a significantly higher illegitimacy ratio than do teenagers aged 18 – 19. In addition, there are many more risks associated with teen pregnancies. For these reasons, Vermont chooses to focus its efforts on reducing teen pregnancies.

By targeting the teenage population, Vermont is in the best position to reach the widest captive audience and have the greatest effect. This is particularly true with the younger teens who are more accessible as a group because they are still of school age. Focusing on teens eventually affects the greater population as the teens move toward adulthood.

Reducing teen pregnancies reduces the overall illegitimacy ratio because the vast majority of these births are to single mothers. From 1991 to 2000, Vermont's young teen (age 15 –17) pregnancy rate dropped 50.2 percent ranking Vermont as the state with the greatest percent decrease in the nation. Between 1996 and 1999, the illegitimacy rate for teens under 18 dropped three percentage points. The national goal for teenage pregnancy in 1998 was 46 pregnancies per 1000 females age 15 – 17. Vermont's rate at that time was 22 pregnancies per 1000 females age 15 - 17.

Vermont's goal continues to be to maintain its rate of 22 pregnancies per 1000 or to achieve a rate lower than 22 pregnancies per 1000. The teen birth rate in Vermont declined 47 percent between 1991 and 2004. In 2004, Vermont met its goal of continuing to lower its teen pregnancy rate. The Vermont teen birth rate in 2004 was 20.9 per 1000 girls aged 15-19 (the national rate was 41.1 per 1000 girls aged 15-19). Among all states, the 2004 teen birth rate in Vermont ranks 2nd (50 = highest). In 2000, Vermont had the second lowest rate in the nation of 10.6 pregnancies per 1000 for females age 15 – 17 and the lowest rate in the nation of 44.5 pregnancies per 1000 for females age 18 - 19. In its effort to achieve a lower teen pregnancy rate, Vermont has set the goal of increasing the percentage of adolescents who abstain from sexual intercourse or use condoms if sexually active from 85% to 95%. An expected result of achieving this goal is a further decline in the teenage pregnancy and illegitimacy rates for the state.

No single program or initiative accounts for the decreasing incidence of teen pregnancies in Vermont. The strategy includes a combination of integrated services, education and commitments that have contributed to improved adolescent health and behavior. Some of the contributing factors employed by the state include access to appropriate health care, comprehensive health and sexuality education where students learn responsible decision-making, and improved prospects for the future. The state partners with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Vermont to provide teen programs and centers where teens can go to engage in healthy activities

and socialization during off-school times when many parents are at work and parental supervision may be unavailable.

Some research suggests that nearly half of adolescent girls who become pregnant have earlier been victims of sexual abuse, which is associated with later risky sexual behavior. Vermont has made remarkable progress in reducing child sexual abuse and its commitment to maintain this trend may result in further declines in teenage pregnancies.

(a)(1)(A)(vi) Conduct a program, designed to reach State and local law enforcement officials, the education system, and relevant counseling services, that provides education and training on the problem of statutory rape so that teenage pregnancy prevention programs may be expanded in scope to include men.

Beginning in 1985, the Children and Family Council for Prevention Programs has shared responsibility in the Vermont Prevention Institute to produce a biennial Vermont Primary Prevention Plan. As stated in Chapter 33 of the Vermont Statutes, the plan “coordinates and consolidates the primary prevention planning efforts of state agencies and departments.” This process enhances the ability of state government to work in partnership with communities to improve the well-being of all Vermonters.

The Vermont Primary Prevention Plan 2000 (Prevention Plan) was created from ideas and inspirations gathered in meetings held by state agencies and departments in the fall of 1999. From those meetings, four focus areas were identified and each agency and department then created goals and action steps to achieve them. The Prevention Plan acknowledges the prevention efforts by state agencies and departments as reflected in the vision “Prevention is the strategy of first choice.”

The Prevention Plan sets several goals and action plans that are relevant to the problem of statutory rape. State agencies are to join with police and community members from the service and private sector to make a universal declaration of human rights that supports the premise that violence against women and girls is a violation of their human rights. The Prevention Plan also sets a goal to reduce domestic violence by adolescent boys by providing prevention and education groups for adolescent boys, and to collaborate with high schools as part of a curriculum for all rather than identified at-risk students. Health educators provide technical assistance to schools; and family planning clinic providers are available to work with schools to provide training for teachers, review curricula and present classes on topics such as sexual violence.

Boys, girls, young men and women receive and benefit from comprehensive health education in Vermont’s elementary and secondary schools. Comprehensive health education includes the study of several topics directly related to statutory rape, such as sexuality, reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases and their prevention, development of responsible personal behavior and decision making about sexual activity including abstinence; possible outcomes of premature sexual activity, contraceptives, adolescent pregnancy, childbirth, adoption, and abortion. As an available supplement to Vermont’s comprehensive health education, the Lund Family Center, a

grantee of Vermont's Department for Children and Families, provides a powerful teen pregnancy prevention program designed to help teens change risky behaviors. The Lund Center's Pregnancy Prevention Panel visits schools and endeavors to educate other teenagers – young men and women– about the realities of pregnancy and parenting at a young age. The panel members are themselves pregnant or parenting teenagers. A staff member accompanies them to facilitate the discussion and explain the societal and economic impact of teen pregnancy.

To address the problem of statutory rape in a way that reaches young men, Vermont's Department of Corrections works with these offenders to teach them how to accept, understand, modify and maintain permanent changes in behavior relating to statutory rape. This program is cognitive-behavioral and delivered in a 6 month psycho-educational group format or in individual treatment sessions if there are not enough young men in that county to form a group. For this purpose we define statutory rape as consensual sexual activity between a young adult and a minor under the age of consent in which there is a mutually established non-coercive relationship.

(a)(1)(B) SPECIAL PROVISIONS

(i) The document shall indicate whether the State intends to treat families moving into the State from another State differently than other families under the program, and if so, how the State intends to treat such families under the program.

Families moving into Vermont from other states receive the same TANF program benefits as current residents.

(a)(1)(B)(ii) The document shall indicate whether the State intends to provide assistance under the program to individuals who are not citizens of the United States, and if so, shall include an overview of such assistance.

Vermont provides assistance to U.S. citizens, nationals and qualified aliens pursuant to federal law. Provided they meet other Reach Up program eligibility criteria, Vermont provides TANF-funded Reach Up assistance to qualified aliens who entered the United States prior to August 22, 1996; qualified aliens who entered the United States on or after August 22, 1996 who have been in a qualified alien status for five years; and to those qualified aliens who entered the United States on or after August 22, 1996 who are exempted from the five-year bar. Those exempted from the 5-year bar include asylees; refugees (including victims of severe forms of trafficking); aliens whose deportation is being withheld, Amerasians, Cuban and Haitian entrants, veterans, members of the military on active duty, and their spouses and unmarried dependent children.

(a)(1)(B)(iii) The document shall set forth objective criteria for the delivery of benefits and the determination of eligibility and for fair and equitable treatment, including an explanation of how the State will provide opportunities for recipients who have been adversely affected to be heard in a State administrative or appeal process.

Vermont will continue to operate the Reach Program based on objective criteria for determination of eligibility and delivery of benefits according to program regulations in the Reach Up Manual and, for child care assistance, according to regulatory standards established by Vermont's lead agency for administration of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, the Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families. Specific changes in these rules are accomplished only after a process of administrative rule making that provides opportunity for public comment.

Vermont will continue its current fair hearing process, which provides an opportunity for a hearing before the Human Services Board or by a hearing officer appointed by the board. In accordance with Vermont law (3 V.S.A. § 3091), an opportunity for a fair hearing is granted to any individual requesting a hearing because his or her claim for assistance, benefits, or services was denied, reduced or is not acted upon with reasonable promptness. An applicant for or recipient of assistance from the Department for Children and Families is also entitled to a fair hearing if that individual is aggrieved by agency regulation as it affects his or her situation. Vermont law assures recipients who have been adversely affected an opportunity to be heard in a state administrative appeal process.

(a)(1)(B)(iv) Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, unless the chief executive officer of the State opts out of this provision by notifying the Secretary, a State shall, consistent with the exception provided in section 407(e)(2), require a parent or caretaker receiving assistance under the program who, after receiving such assistance for 2 months is not exempt from work requirements and is not engaged in work, as determined under section 407(c), to participate in community service employment, with minimum hours per week and tasks to be determined by the State.

Vermont will continue to operate the program under current policy and rules, as indicated in this state plan renewal.

Vermont exercises its option not to impose the work requirement specified in this provision and notified HHS of this in a letter dated December 18, 2003, from Governor James Douglas to ACF Regional Administrator Stan Gardner.

(a)(2) CERTIFICATIONS

Certifications by Governor James Douglas, Vermont's chief executive officer, are provided in Attachment A.

Attachment A: Certifications

Attachment B: State Plan Funding

Attachment C: Program Income Eligibility Chart

Attachment D: Reach Up Work Activities Rules

Contact Person:

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Senior Policy and Regulatory Attorney-Analyst
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Department for Children and Families
Agency of Human Services
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Tel: (802) 241-2887
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STATE OF VERMONT

TANF State Plan Renewal

For the period October 1, 2009 through December 31, 2012

CERTIFICATIONS

Vermont will operate a Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program in all political subdivisions of the state under title IV-A of the Social Security Act. The program is known as the Reach Up Program.

1. The Economic Services Division (ESD) of the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) will administer and supervise the program. Local governments and private sector organizations—

(a) have been consulted regarding the plan and design of welfare services in the state so that services are provided in a manner appropriate to local populations; and

(b) have had at least 45 days to submit comments on the plan and design of such services.

2. The state will operate a child support enforcement program in accordance with the state plan approved under title IV-D.

3. The state will operate a foster care and adoption assistance program in accordance with title IV-E and will take all necessary actions to ensure that children receiving assistance are eligible for medical assistance.

4. The state will provide each member of an Indian tribe, who is domiciled in the state and is not eligible for assistance under a Tribal Family Assistance plan approved under Section 412, with equitable access to assistance under the state program funded under this part attributable to funds provided by the federal government.

5. The state will establish and enforce standards and procedures to ensure against program fraud and abuse, including standards and procedures concerning nepotism, conflicts of interest among individuals responsible for the administration and supervision of the state program, kickbacks, and the use of political patronage.

6. The state will make available to the public a summary of the state plan.

7. Vermont exercises the family violence option under section 402, paragraphs (a)(7)(A) and (B), of the Social Security Act. Accordingly, the Vermont Department for Children and Families has adopted policy and rules, provided staff training, and implemented

Vermont State TANF Plan – Certifications

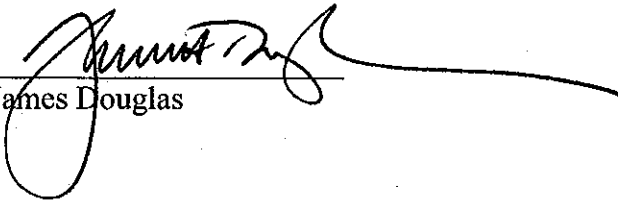
October 1, 2009 – December 31, 2012

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procedures for its TANF program, Reach Up, that are designed to help families address the effects of domestic violence and move toward self-sufficiency through work.

I, James Douglas, Governor of Vermont, provide these certifications and assurances.

12/18/09
Date


James Douglas

STATE OF VERMONT
TANF State Plan Renewal

For the period October 1, 2009, through December 31, 2012

FUNDING

1. Payments to Agency Administering the TANF Program Payments for the TANF program will be made to the Department for Children and Families, 103 South Main Street, Waterbury, VT 05671-1201.

2. Payments for the TANF Program will be made in quarterly installments, for each fiscal year during the period of renewal by percentage, as follows:

1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
25%	25%	25%	25%

Program Income Eligibility Criteria

Attachment C

NAME OF PROGRAM	INCOME LEVELS	RESOURCE LIMITS																		
<p>Reach Up Program including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach Up Separate State Component 	<p>Countable income below payment standards calculated by (1) adding countable housing expenses up to the maximum allowance for the county of residence to the basic needs allowance for the family size, (2) multiplying the sum by the ratable reduction percentage (49.6 %), and (3) rounding the result down.</p> <p>Housing maximum allowance</p> <p>\$400 outside Chittenden County \$450 inside Chittenden County</p> <p>Basic Needs Allowance by Household Size</p> <table data-bbox="813 1077 1053 1471"> <tr><td>\$ 475</td><td>1 person</td></tr> <tr><td>\$ 680</td><td>2 persons</td></tr> <tr><td>\$ 891</td><td>3 persons</td></tr> <tr><td>\$1064</td><td>4 persons</td></tr> <tr><td>\$1247</td><td>5 persons</td></tr> <tr><td>\$1372</td><td>6 persons</td></tr> <tr><td>\$1589</td><td>7 persons</td></tr> <tr><td>\$1769</td><td>8 persons</td></tr> <tr><td>\$ 170</td><td>Each additional person</td></tr> </table>	\$ 475	1 person	\$ 680	2 persons	\$ 891	3 persons	\$1064	4 persons	\$1247	5 persons	\$1372	6 persons	\$1589	7 persons	\$1769	8 persons	\$ 170	Each additional person	<p>Countable resources shall not exceed \$2,000.</p>
\$ 475	1 person																			
\$ 680	2 persons																			
\$ 891	3 persons																			
\$1064	4 persons																			
\$1247	5 persons																			
\$1372	6 persons																			
\$1589	7 persons																			
\$1769	8 persons																			
\$ 170	Each additional person																			
<p>Emergency Assistance</p>	<p>Countable income below Reach Up payment levels above.</p>	<p>Shall have no resources available to meet the emergency need.</p>																		
<p>Reach Ahead</p>	<p>Must have met the Reach Up eligibility criteria above within 6 months prior to Reach Ahead application and must be meeting applicable federal work activity through employment.</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>																		

Program Income Eligibility Criteria

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Child Care	Same as eligibility for Reach Up Program (see above).	Same as Reach Up Program (see above).
Step Up Program	Incarcerated mothers of minor children must meet the income eligibility for the Reach Up Program (see above).	Same as Reach Up Program (see above).
Reach First	Same eligibility criteria as Reach Up program (see above).	Same as Reach Up Program (see above)
Individual Development Account (IDA) Program	Reach Up eligibility criteria (see above).	Same as Reach Up Program (see above).
Earned Income Tax Credit	Parents of minor children who are financially eligible for the federal earned income tax credit.	Not applicable