



STATE OF VERMONT
Vermont TANF State Plan Renewal

For The Period October 1, 2015 through December 31, 2018

PURPOSE

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, and renewed on October 1, 1998; October 1, 2001; October 1, 2003; October 1, 2006; October 1, 2009; October 1, 2012 and with subsequent amendments.

This renewal is being submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, through the Director of the Administration for Children and Families, in Washington, DC, in December 2015.

BACKGROUND

Vermont operates four Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) funded programs: Reach Up, Reach First, Emergency Assistance, and the Earned Income Tax Credit; as well as two Maintenance of Effort-funded (MOE) programs, Reach Up Separate State Program and Reach Ahead, to serve the broad purposes of title IV-A of the Social Security Act. Vermont's family assistance grant is used to provide TANF, and to otherwise fulfill federal and state requirements to strengthen families by helping them to become self-sufficient through employment.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

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 bold headings are from section 402 of the Social Security Act (the Act).

(a)(1) OUTLINE OF THE 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.

Outline of the Reach Up Program's General Provisions

On July 1, 2001, Vermont implemented Reach Up, its principal TANF program. The Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) is the single state agency that administers Reach Up. The program operates uniformly in twelve district offices throughout the state.

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, Reach Up 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.

The rules and procedures which govern the Reach Up program can be found in the Reach Up manual located online at: <http://humanservices.vermont.gov/on-line-rules/esd>.

Application

Financial eligibility for the program is determined by income and resource limits (see Attachment C). 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, other standardized evaluations, and referrals to other professionals. 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 and Employment Services

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 through unsubsidized employment. DCF contracts with entities with special expertise to provide case management services to teenage parents and participants with significant barriers to obtaining employment. DCF contracts with entities with special expertise to provide job coaching and job development services.

Family Development Plans

Every participant must have an 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. DCF 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.

DCF 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 (see “Work Requirement Hours” below).

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 Human Services’ (HHS) interim final TANF rules implementing the statutory changes enacted in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), DCF amended the Reach Up work activity rules to define individual work activities consistent with new federal definitions. These changes were effective December 1, 2006 (see 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, a participant’s work requirement may be deferred or modified. 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. Noncompliance supported by good cause may be excused.

Sanctions for Noncompliance with Services Component Requirements

If a participating adult, including a minor parent, fails to comply with services component requirements, DCF 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. DCF also offers incentive payments for participants to complete specified tasks leading to achievement of an FDP requirement, such as improvement of parenting skills and participation in secondary education.

Transportation

- **Good News Garage**
In a contract with this charitable organization, DCF 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 or education.
- **Capstone Transportation**
The Reach Up Program contracts with the Capstone Transportation program to educate Reach Up participants on the cost to purchase and maintain vehicles, credit scores, and the development of savings. This program also offers a second opinion on whether a vehicle is worth repairing or not for participants that currently have their own vehicle, and are asking Reach Up for funds to cover their repairs.
- **Ready to Go**
DCF 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 FDP.
- **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 FDP.

Housing

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

Group Work Sites

DCF 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.

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 (MOE) requirements for TANF.

Temporary Absences

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.

Time Limits

A family in which a participating adult has received 60 or more countable, cumulative months of Reach Up financial assistance, or cash assistance funded by a TANF block grant in another state, shall be ineligible for assistance under the Reach Up program unless each participating adult is fully complying with Reach Up services component requirements and is:

- deferred from his or her work requirement; or
- meeting the work requirement through a community service placement, employment, or other countable work activities.

Months in which a participant is deferred from the work requirement due to a medical condition, caring for a child during the first 12 months of a possible 24-month primary caretaker deferment, caring for an ill or disabled family member in the home, or domestic violence do not count toward the time limit. Months in which a parent is under the age of 18 or in a two-parent household with a parent under the age of 18 do not count toward the time limit. Assistance groups with no participating adult are exempt from time limits.

Job Retention and Enhancement Services

Reach Up participants who obtain unsubsidized 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 after they leave the program. 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 unsubsidized employment during their employment phase.

Other TANF-Funded Programs

Reach First – Vermont’s Diversion Program

Families who file a new application for assistance because they are experiencing a short-term financial crisis may be eligible to participate in Vermont’s diversion program. 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 families’ needs. The purpose of the program is to assist the family to overcome a temporary and short-term crisis.

Financial and non-financial eligibility criteria for Reach First are the same as for Vermont’s Reach Up program, except that families’ 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 be able to participate in the program after they have been oriented to the program participation requirements and 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.

Emergency Assistance

Vermont’s TANF program authorizes emergency assistance (formerly 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 both TANF- and MOE-funded. 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 amount, back rent and mortgage arrears that will prevent homelessness, current utility bills, minimum heating fuel delivery, and cash benefit for food and personal needs.

Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program is designed 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.

MOE-Funded Programs

Separate State Programs are programs funded with state general funds that are counted towards Vermont's MOE requirement.

The Reach Up Separate State Program Component

This program is structured to pay financial assistance with appropriated state MOE funds to families in which the parent or caretaker is engaged in unsubsidized employment 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 TANF MOE. 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 nutritional assistance and support services program. The purpose of the 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 nutritional assistance and services to families who have left the Reach Up or the Postsecondary Education (PSE) financial assistance programs within the past six months.

Eligible families receive \$50 of nutritional assistance each month for the first 12 months and \$5 for the second 12 months of Reach Ahead participation. Families can purchase only food with Reach Ahead nutritional assistance. Eligible families also receive support services, including a 100% child care subsidy, for the duration of time they receive nutritional assistance.

To be eligible for Reach Ahead 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 unsubsidized employment;
3. include a minor child; and
4. meet all other the Reach Up requirements such as residency, family composition and verification of income.

(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 Reach Up statute, 33 V.S.A. §§ 1112-1116, 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, as required by his or her FDP, 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.

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.

When a participant who has received 60 or more countable, cumulative months of Reach Up financial assistance, or cash assistance funded by a TANF block grant in another state, refuses to engage in work without good cause, the family's financial assistance is terminated and the family is ineligible to receive assistance for a period of two months.

(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 fully or partially independent of welfare. Caseworkers help participants define employment goals based on individualized

assessments of their needs and strengths. The FDP specifies the participant's employment goal, steps and services needed to achieve the goal, and target dates for completion. The FDP also defines what support services the department will pay for, 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. § 111) 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.

Vermont continues to achieve a teen pregnancy rate that is lower than 22 pregnancies per 1000. The teen birth rate in Vermont declined 57 percent between 1991 and 2011. The Vermont teen birth rate in 2011 was 16.8 per 100 girls aged 15-19 (the national rate was 31.3 per 1000 girls aged 15-19). Among all states, the 2011 teen birth rate in Vermont ranks 48 out of 51 (51 having the fewest number of teen pregnancies).

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. In addition, 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 33 V.S.A. § 3303 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 older men, Vermont’s Department of Corrections works with offenders to teach them how to accept, understand, modify and maintain permanent changes in behavior relating to illegal sexual behavior, such as statutory rape. This formal program is cognitive-behavioral and delivered primarily in group format, although extensive homework is required. The major goals of the program are to help offenders (1) accept responsibility for sexual offending, (2) modify distorted thinking patterns, (3) enhance victim empathy, (4) control deviant sexual urges, (5) improve social competence, (6) develop relapse prevention skills, and (7) develop community support systems.

The institutional program is provided to inmates assigned to a specialized unit where they live and participate in the program. The program lasts between two and five years. The community sex offender program serves those who are on furlough and parole. This group meets weekly and may continue over several years, focusing on relapse prevention. The institutional and community programs are a continuum and adhere to common philosophy and practices. Both programs are mandatory for participants.

(a)(1)(A)(vii) Outline how the State intends to implement policies and procedures as necessary to prevent access to assistance provided under any electronic fund transaction in an automated teller machine or point-of-sale device located in a place described in section 408(a)(12), including a plan to ensure that recipients of the assistance have adequate access to their cash assistance.

Participants have access to cash assistance through Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards or, for participants with a bank account, through direct deposit into their personal bank account. EBT cards are accepted at over 1,000 automated teller machines (ATM) throughout the state and at authorized Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) retailers.

On November 1, 2013, Vermont adopted the following regulation restricting access to assistance through EBT transactions at prohibited locations:

A recipient of a money grant shall not knowingly use or access assistance in any electronic benefit transfer transaction in a:

- A. retail establishment which sells exclusively or primarily any alcoholic beverages defined in 7 V.S.A. § 2;*
- B. casino, gambling casino, or gaming establishment; or*
- C. retail establishment which provides adult-oriented entertainment in which performers disrobe or perform in an unclothed state for entertainment.*

A recipient who uses or accesses assistance in any of the above prohibited electronic benefit transfer transactions shall reimburse the department for the amount of assistance used or accessed in the prohibited transaction.

Vermont’s revised food, fuel and financial assistance application includes an acknowledgment in the “Rights and Responsibilities” section that an applicant who is found eligible for Reach Up understands that “withdrawing or spending Reach Up financial assistance is prohibited at the following locations: liquor stores,

bars, casinos or other gaming facilities, and retail businesses that provide adult-oriented entertainment in which performers disrobe or perform in an unclothed state.”

In August 2015, DCF utilized new EBT software to block access to TANF assistance at ATMs in approximately 65 identified prohibited locations.

Reports of prohibited EBT transactions will be referred to the DCF, Economic Services Division (ESD) Fraud Unit for further investigation.

(a)(1)(A)(viii) Ensure that recipients of assistance provided under the State program funded under this part have access to using or withdrawing assistance with minimal fees or charges, including an opportunity to access assistance with no fee or charges, and are provided information on applicable fees and surcharges that apply to electronic fund transactions involving the assistance, and that such information is made publicly available.

Participants have the option of having their benefits directly deposited into their personal bank accounts, or, if they do not have a bank account, benefits can be accessed through their EBT card. Information about how and where to use the card is available to participants at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/ebt>. ESD posts a list of financial institutions and merchants in the state who accept the card, including those who do not apply a surcharge to the transaction. When participants receive their EBT card, they are also given a flyer which explains that they can call the toll free number to find out where they can withdraw their cash assistance at no cost.

(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 benefits from the TANF program 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, Amer-Asians, Cuban and Haitian entrants, veterans, members of the military on active duty, and their spouses and unmarried dependent children.

Provided they met the standard eligibility criteria of Reach Up, Vermont law (33 V.S.A. §1121(d)(5)) established a separate state program to provide state-funded assistance to qualified aliens who were receiving assistance before Vermont’s waiver expired on July 1, 2001, and who were not eligible for TANF-funded assistance. Legal permanent residents who have worked 40 qualifying quarters of coverage are eligible for TANF-funded assistance if they meet federal criteria.

(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 rules and procedures 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 (CDD) of DCF. 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 (HSB) 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 DCF is also entitled to a fair hearing if that individual is aggrieved by agency policy 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)(1)(B)(v) The document shall indicate whether the State intends to assist individuals to train for, seek, and maintain employment--

- (I) providing direct care in a long-term care facility (as such terms are defined under [section 1397j](#) of this title); or**
- (II) in other occupations related to elder care determined appropriate by the State for which the State identifies an unmet need for service personnel, and, if so, shall include an overview of such assistance.**

Vermont does not intend to exercise the above options at this time.

(a)(2) CERTIFICATIONS

Certifications by Governor Peter Shumlin, 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:

Tricia Tyo
Reach Up/TANF Director
Agency of Human Services/Department for Children and Families/Economic Services Division
280 State Drive
Waterbury, VT 05671-1201
phone: 802-769-6447
fax: 802-769-2186
email: tricia.tyo@vermont.gov

Attachment A

STATE OF VERMONT TANF
State Plan Renewal
For the period October 1, 2015 through December 31, 2018

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 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, Peter Shumlin, Governor of Vermont, provide these certifications and assurances.

Peter Shumlin, Governor

Attachment B

STATE OF VERMONT TANF State Plan

Renewal

For the period October 1, 2015 through December 31, 2018

1. Payments to the Agency administering the payments for the TANF program will be made to the Department for Children and Families, 280 State Drive, 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:

| <i>1st</i> Quarter | <i>2nd</i> Quarter | <i>3rd</i> Quarter | <i>4th</i> Quarter |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 25% | 25% | 25% | 25% |

Attachment D

The following descriptions of Reach Up work activities are from Reach Up Services Rules §§ 2350 *et seq.*

2350 Work and Work Activities (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Work activities are the activities that participants must engage in to fulfill their work requirement (rule 2340). Only the types of activities specified in this section may be counted toward fulfillment of the work requirement. An approved activity is an activity that has been approved by the case manager as an FDP requirement. A countable activity is one that can be counted toward the hours of a participants work requirement, in accordance with Reach Up rules.

Before participants are work-ready, they shall engage in any work activities they can perform, as long as the case manager has approved the activity, the activity is included in the participants FDP, and participation in the activity leads to attainment of the participant's employment goal. After a participant is work-ready, the participant must engage in the approved work activities that are countable toward that participants work requirement and support the most expeditious attainment of the participant's employment goal.

The following sections describe the general categories of work activities that may be counted toward fulfillment of the work requirement. As shown below, nine of the activities are "core activities" and three of the activities are "non-core activities."

Core Activities

2350.1 Unsubsidized Employment (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Unsubsidized employment is a core activity. Unsubsidized employment is a job with wages that are not subsidized with Reach Up or any other public funds.

Self-employment is a type of unsubsidized employment. Self-employment is working for oneself in a job that results in net income to the participant, after business expenses, of no less than the sum of Vermont's minimum wage multiplied by the number of hours the participant claims as working in self-employment.

A participant may count hours engaged in self-employment when the participant is meeting the full work requirement with hours in self-employment or in self-employment combined with hours in other countable work activities.

Participants may count toward their work requirement hours engaged in self-employment when:

- The hours the participant claims as engaged in self-employment are either verifiable as specified in Vermont's federally-approved work verification plan or net the participant the Vermont minimum wage after business costs calculated consistent with Reach Up financial eligibility rules;
- The self-employment is included in the participants FDP as an approved activity; and
- The hours the participant engages in self-employment alone or when combined with hours the participant spends in other approved and countable activities fulfills the participants entire work requirement.

2350.2 Subsidized Private Employment (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Subsidized private employment is a core activity. Subsidized private employment is a job in the private sector that pays wages that are subsidized with Reach Up or other public funds or for which the employer receives a subsidy from TANF or other public funds to offset some or all of the wages and costs of employing a participant. Subsidized employment includes supported employment for individuals who have disabilities when it is supported with TANF or public funds.

2350.3 Subsidized Public Employment (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Subsidized public employment is a core activity. Subsidized public employment is the same as subsidized private employment in all respects except that the job is in a public sector employment setting.

2350.4 Work Experience (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Work experience is a core activity. Participants engaged in this activity are not employees of the worksite or the State of Vermont.

Participation in work experience as a countable activity is to improve the employability of those individuals who have not been able to find unsubsidized employment. Participation in this activity should help the participant establish a good work record and develop good work habits and skills. The type of skills a participant might develop in this activity include learning how to follow instructions, work independently, be a reliable worker, maintain a work schedule and improve work habits.

2350.5 On-the-Job Training (12/01/2006, 06-24)

On-the-job training is a core activity. On-the-job training is an activity with daily supervision in which the participant receives training related to performance of a job while engaged in productive work. An apprenticeship is a type of on-the-job training. The participant must be a paid employee during the time the participant spends in on-the-job training.

2350.6 Job Search (02/01/2009, 08-10)

Job search is a core activity. Job search includes a variety of activities that are designed to improve the participants employment prospects and that are supervised on a daily basis. This is an appropriate activity for any participant seeking unsubsidized employment or needing skills that will prepare the participant to seek, obtain, perform and maintain a job. For example, job search includes the following types of employment readiness activities:

- resume and application preparation;
- job interviews;
- work search and work-search training;
- life skills training; and
- substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment or rehabilitation activities for those who are otherwise employable, when determined to be necessary and certified by a qualified medical and mental health professional.

For purposes of the federal work participation rate, participants may count hours engaged in this activity up to their entire weekly hour requirement. This activity may however count for only up to six weeks during a twelve-month period.

For purposes of the 12-month limit to six weeks on job search, one week equals the number of hours of the participant's work requirement. A participant with a 30 hour work requirement is limited to no more than 180 hours of job search in the 12-month period and a participant with a 20 hour work requirement is limited to 120 hours of job search in the 12-month period. For purposes of the four consecutive weeks' limitation, any hours of job search in a week counts toward that limitation. Participants may use their six weeks of job search in any hourly increments as long as they do not exceed their limit and have no more than four consecutive weeks with any hours of job search.

The twelve-month period is determined by the preceding 12 months of participation, but shall not include any time before October 1, 2008. Of the six weeks, only four may be consecutive, and the case manager shall approve the activity in periods of no longer than two weeks. In no event shall the department require an individual to participate in job search for more than four weeks before an assessment of the participant's employability is completed. If the participant's assessment reveals reasons why job search is not an appropriate activity for the participant, the requirement to participate in job search shall be terminated.

2350.7 Community Service Programs (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Community service is a core activity. Community service programs are structured activities monitored by the case manager or other entity. Hours a participant spends in community service provide a benefit to the community or member of the community. The placements may be located at public or nonprofit sites with local supervision on a daily basis. Hours a participant engages in any type of organized community service placement, including those organized and required by the corrections department or diversion program, are community service programs within this activity. Participants in this work activity are not employees of the placement site or of the State of Vermont.

Placement in this activity will provide participants with the opportunity to maintain their employment skills as well as to demonstrate their employment potential when they have been unable to obtain subsidized or unsubsidized work. The placement may also provide training and experience designed to enhance the participant's skills.

Placement in community service programs arranged by the department must be conducted in accordance with a contract between the department and the placement that specifies provisions such as length of placement, development of job skills, and release time for job search.

2350.8 Vocational Education (12/01/2001, 06-24)

Vocational education is a core activity. Vocational education is an educational program designed to provide the participant with skills or certification in a specific area of study that prepares the participant for a career or occupation requiring training other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. The program must provide daily supervision. Federal law limits participation in this activity to no more than 12 months for any individual.

Examples of vocational education include training programs to become a nurse's aide, a licensed practical nurse, or an auto mechanic. It also includes organized educational programs directly related to the preparation of individuals for paid employment in such fields as agriculture, education, business occupations, home economics, health occupations, marketing and distributive occupations, technical and emerging occupations, modern industrial and agriculture arts, and trades and industrial occupations. Vocational education includes hours a participant is engaged in postsecondary education (PSE) in accordance with an education plan for a degree approved by the department for up to 12 months.

Non-Core Activities

2350.9 Job Skills Training (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Job skills training is a non-core activity. Job skills training means education or training that enables the participant to become proficient in an occupation or skill necessary to meet the participant's employment goal. Participation in job skills training must be supervised daily and develop or enhance skills directly related to the participant's attainment of, retention of, or advancement in an unsubsidized job available in the local or adjacent labor market or in some other labor market to which the participant is willing to relocate. The job skills training must be directly related to employment if the hours of participation are to be counted toward the participant's work requirement.

Job skills training may include up to two try-out courses taken by a participant before reaching the employment goal. Try-out courses must be in the participant's FDP and provide a participant considering vocational education or the PSE program with information and experience related to that decision. Because job skills training is a non-core activity, hours of participation in this activity only count toward participants work requirements after they have met their minimum requirement of hours in a core activity. Participants with a work activity of fewer than 35 hours must first engage in 20 hours per week of a core activity before hours of participation in this activity count toward their work requirement. Participants with a work activity of 35 or more hours must first engage in 30 hours per week of a core activity before hours of participation in this activity count toward their work requirement.

2350.10 Education Related to Employment (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Education directly related to employment is a non-core activity. Participation in this work activity is limited to participants without a high school diploma or certificate of high school equivalency and must be supervised daily. Adult participants younger than 20 may participate in this activity to meet their full alternative work requirement as defined in rule 2343.3.

Because education directly related to employment is a non-core activity, hours of participation in this activity only count toward participants work requirements after they have met their minimum requirement of hours in a core activity. Participants with a work activity of fewer than 35 hours must first engage in 20 hours per week of a core activity before hours of participation in this activity count toward their work requirement. Participants with a work activity of 35 or more hours must first engage in 30 hours per week of a core activity before hours of participation in this activity count toward their work requirement. Education directly related to employment includes the following:

- basic and remedial education that will provide an individual with basic literacy equivalent to at least grade 8.9;

- education in English proficiency when an individual is unable to understand, speak, read, or write the English language at a level necessary to obtain employment consistent with the participant's employment goal;
- education designed to prepare a person to qualify for a high school diploma or its equivalent; and
- a secondary school program.

2350.11 Satisfactory Attendance at Secondary School (12/01/2006, 06-24)

Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to a certificate of general equivalence is a non-core activity. This is a countable activity for participants who have not completed high school or received a certificate of general equivalence and who regularly attend, in accordance with the requirements of the school or course of study, and receive daily supervision. Because satisfactory attendance at a secondary school or in a course of study leading to a certificate of general equivalence is a non-core activity, hours of participation in this activity only count toward participants work requirements after they have met their minimum requirement of hours in a core activity. Participants with a work activity of fewer than 35 hours must first engage in 20 hours per week of a core activity before hours of participation in this activity count toward their work requirement. Participants with a work activity of 35 or more hours must first engage in 30 hours per week of a core activity before hours of participation in this activity count toward their work requirement. Adult participants younger than 20 may participate in this activity to meet their full alternative work requirement as defined in rule 2343.3.