

States Could Reduce Extreme Child Poverty Sharply By Enrolling in TANF the Millions of TANF-Eligible Children Who Are Enrolled in SNAP but not in TANF

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The eligible family enrollment rate has fallen in TANF from 78.9% in 1996 when TANF was enacted, to 32.3% in 2009, the most recent year for which data are available.¹ Assuming that the enrollment rate has not fallen even further since 2009, there are now about 3.7 million families with about 7 million children who are financially eligible for TANF but not receiving it. Most of these families are extremely poor, meaning with an income less 50% of the poverty line, as in every state TANF financial eligibility standards are below 50% of poverty.²

SNAP, unlike TANF, enrolls most eligible children, achieving an 85% enrollment rate for eligible families with children in 2009.³ As the TANF eligible family enrollment rate has declined, the share of SNAP recipient families with children also receiving TANF has likewise declined, falling from 58% in 1997 to 16% in 2011.⁴

In an average month in 2011, 1.2 million SNAP recipient families with about 2.4 million children had no income from TANF or any other source. These families were all income eligible for TANF. Approximately 1.7 million additional SNAP recipient families with about 3.4 million children had an income less than 50% of poverty and did not receive TANF. Many of these families were also eligible for TANF even though not receiving it.

These numbers show that states could significantly reduce extreme child poverty simply by enrolling in TANF all TANF-eligible SNAP-recipient children. However, TANF's "block grant" financing disincentivizes the enrollment of eligible families, as the amount of federal funding a state receives for its TANF program is the same regardless of the size of the state's TANF caseload. As far as we could determine, no state has established a program specifically to facilitate the enrollment in TANF of TANF-eligible families who are receiving SNAP but not TANF. States are unlikely to establish such programs unless federal law is amended to require them to do so.

(June 2013. Contact Timothy Casey, tcasey@legalmomentum.org, for further information.)

¹ See Legal Momentum, *TANF Receipt Falls To Less Than One Third Of Eligible Families* (April 2013), <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/tanf-receipt-falls-to-less.pdf>.

² \$19,530 is the current poverty guideline for a family of 3.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2002 to Fiscal Year 2009*.

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 1997, and Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2011*.