



Teen Parents and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: A Summary of Recent Congressional Action

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The high rate of teen births and questions about how to reduce the number of out-of-wedlock births—including subsequent births to teen parents—were of particular concern during the 1996 overhaul of the federal welfare program. As a result, the law that replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program contained two provisions that proponents expected would increase the economic self-sufficiency of minor parents and their families: minor parent recipients are required to participate in education or training and are required to reside in an approved living situation, typically with a parent or other adult relative.

This paper summarizes Congressional action in 2001-2003 related to teen parents and TANF. The TANF law was not reauthorized when it expired at the end of September 2002 and now operates under a continuing resolution. In 2002, the House passed a measure, but a bill approved by the Senate Finance Committee never reached the floor. The House passed a measure in 2003 almost identical to the one passed the year before, while the Senate has yet this year to deliberate reauthorization. The current status of reauthorization in 2003 has resulted in little discussion specifically related to teen parents.

While teen parent families were of concern during the 1996 debates, little was known during the first few years of TANF program implementation about the effects the two minor parent rules had on the young families that were required to comply with them. In effect, teen parents were an almost invisible population of TANF recipients. However, several years after the implementation of TANF, research began to emerge showing that the minor parent rules are, in some cases, preventing needy, young families from receiving assistance—or even receiving an application for assistance.¹ Compliance with the living arrangement rule, in particular, may be difficult for some minor parents because no dedicated funding was provided for alternative living arrangements—such as “second chance” homes—in the 1996 TANF law or through the annual appropriations process. Further, analysis of TANF sanction data indicates that teen parent recipients may be sanctioned more often than the overall caseload.²

As a result of these findings, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) began looking at options to improve the TANF law for minor as well as older teen parent recipients.

Recommendations developed by CLASP, the National Network for Youth, and the National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention (NOAPPP), as well as state and local partners (such as the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health), have been endorsed by more than 100 groups (see the Appendix for the recommendations and a discussion of the main issues related to teen parents in TANF). The recommendations address such issues as the two minor parent rules, the limits related to vocational education that generally apply to older teen parents, and the need for better data on teen parents. To view the endorsing organizations, visit http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1060174403.92/Teen_Parent_Recs.pdf.

This document summarizes a short history of Congressional bills and actions directly targeted at teen parents through the TANF program. Not covered are a host of other issues that could affect teen parents and their families, such as marriage promotion and teen pregnancy prevention and abstinence-unless-married education programs. We do include actions on second chance (maternity group³) home provisions even if they do not amend the TANF statute; some second chance homes provisions are contained in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA). Regardless of their statutory location, such provisions could directly affect minor parents' ability to comply with the minor parent living arrangement rule under TANF.

This legislative history does not seek to fully explain the issues underlying the provisions affecting teen parents, but instead to provide a ready resource on "what happened when" (visit http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs_Health for more in-depth analyses).⁴ Whether or not the 108th Congress takes any action regarding teen parents when TANF is reauthorized, it is likely that a number of areas will remain unaddressed.⁵ Pending measures in the 108th Congress are listed first, then, measures from prior years.

Teen Parent Provisions Acted on in 2003

House

In February, the House passed a TANF reauthorization bill, the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act (H.R. 4), which had been introduced by Rep. Deborah Pryce (R-OH). The bill would increase work requirements for recipients; for example, it establishes a 40-hour work week for all adult welfare recipients, up from 30 for most families and 20 for families with children under the age of six. H.R. 4 would eliminate the current law's cap on vocational education (currently only 30 percent of the caseload can participate and "count" towards federal requirements) but would limit full-time participation in such programs to no more than four months in 24. After four months, participation in such programs could only be allowed if the individual was also in a direct work activity for at least 24 hours a week. Thus, teen parents (typically, 18- and 19-year-olds) would still be in competition with adults for limited access to vocational education slots. H.R. 4 maintains that teen parents younger than 20 years of age are considered to be meeting the work requirement if they have satisfactory attendance at a secondary school or equivalent or if they participate in education directly related to employment for an average of at least 20 hours per week. The bill does not make changes related to the minor parent eligibility provisions (the education/training and living arrangement rules).

In May, the House passed the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act (H.R. 1925), which was introduced by Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-GA). The Act includes a provision that identifies maternity group homes as an explicit type of transitional living program (TLP) and increases potential funding.⁶ In addition, the measure permits youths age 16 to remain in the TLP until age 18, an exception to the current 18-month maximum stay.

Senate

The Senate Finance Committee is expected to debate a TANF measure in September 2003.

The Savings for Working Families Act, introduced by Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA), passed the Senate in April 2003. The bill, a version of the CARE Act (S. 476, see the CARE Act introduced by Sen. Santorum below), includes authorization of \$33 million for maternity group homes in FY 2003 and “such sums as necessary” in FY 2004. The measure also authorizes an evaluation of maternity group homes funded under the bill.

Other Teen Parent Provisions Introduced in 2003

House

- Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) introduced the Patsy Mink Memorial TANF Reauthorization Act (a substitute to H.R. 4) in February, which would eliminate the requirement that minor parents participate in high school or another equivalent program, and eliminate the requirement that minor parents live in an approved living situation in order to qualify for TANF.
- Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) introduced the Building Secure and Healthy Families Act (H.R. 706) in February. The bill would allow for a “transitional compliance” period of up to 90 days for teen parents applying for TANF so that they may come into compliance with the education/training and living arrangement rules; include teen parents attending post-secondary school in the participation rates; start the time clock for teen parents participating in education or training at age 20; require the state agency to provide (or ensure provision of) alternative living arrangements as needed (such as maternity group homes), to allow teen parents a say when locating housing, to disclose living arrangements options to teen parents, to allow teen parents to appeal living arrangement decisions, and to expand the definition of second chance homes to include transitional living youth projects funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act; and direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to conduct studies of teen pregnancy and teen parents, as well as a study of sanctions imposed on teen parents.
- Rep. Roy Blunt (R-MO) introduced the Charitable Giving Act (H.R. 7) in May. The bill includes a provision relating to maternity group homes, authorizing maternity group homes to receive RHYA grant dollars (see the CARE Act introduced by Sen. Santorum below).

Senate

- Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) introduced the Charity, Aid, Recovery, and Empowerment Act (CARE Act, S. 272) in January. The bill explicitly identifies maternity group homes as

allowable recipients of RHYA grant dollars. The act would provide \$33 million in funds under RHYA in FY 2003 and such sums as necessary in FY 2004 for maternity group homes.

- Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) introduced the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act Amendments (S. 367) in February, which would authorize grants to second chance homes and require a 20 percent match by grantees. The bill authorizes \$33 million in FY04, with \$1 million set-aside for evaluation purposes; the funds would remain available until expended.
- Sen. Thomas Carper (D-DE) introduced the Building on Welfare Success Act (S. 1143) in July, a bill that would remove teen parents who are completing secondary school from the vocational education cap of 30 percent.

Teen Parent Provisions Introduced in 2002

House

- The House passed the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act (H.R. 4737) in May, a bill virtually identical to H.R. 4 (see above).
- In the House Ways and Means Committee deliberations of H.R. 4737, Rep. Karen Thurman (D-FL) introduced several amendments, which included the following provisions: start the time clock for teen parents participating in education at age 20, versus the current age 19; authorize the Secretary of HHS to conduct a study of teen parent TANF recipients and low-income teen parents; and ensure that states consult with minor parents about their preferred living arrangement and provide or ensure the provision of alternative living arrangements for minor parents unable to live at home. The Thurman amendments were defeated in Committee by a voice vote.

Senate

- The Finance Committee passed the bi-partisan Work, Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids Act (WORK, H.R. 4737.RS), in July. The WORK bill included several provisions that addressed teen parents, including: a study of teen parent recipients that would measure whether the number of recipients reported is accurate and review assessments used for teen parents to identify educational barriers; and a “transitional compliance” period of up to 60 days for teen parents applying for TANF so that they may come into compliance with the education/training and living arrangement rules. With respect to the cap on vocational education, the WORK bill removed from the cap those in secondary education (and allowed for 24 months of participation, not just 12 months). The bill also authorized \$33 million for second chance homes for each of the fiscal years 2004-2008.
- Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) introduced the Building Secure and Healthy Families Act (S. 2876) in August. Several provisions in the Murray bill related to teen parents: a transitional compliance period; exclusion for teen parents younger than 20 years old from the time limit, including those age 20 who are slated to finish an educational program that they began before turning 20; inclusion of teen parents participating in education in state work participation rates; a teen parent TANF recipient study, including demographic information, what assessments are used, and whether adequate and appropriate services are made available to these recipients; and a study of teen parents who are not TANF recipients, including whether

they sought to apply for TANF, if they received an application, and if they were subsequently contacted after applying.

- Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) introduced the CARE Act (S. 1924) in February, which specified that maternity group homes are allowable recipients of RHYA funds—for a description of the provisions, see Sen. Santorum’s 2003 bill S. 272 above.
- Sen. Rockefeller introduced the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act Amendments (S. 2052) in March, authorizing funds for second chance homes—for a description of the provisions see Sen. Rockefeller’s 2003 bill S. 367 above.

Passed into Law in 2002

- Congress appropriated a \$19 million increase to the RHYA transitional living program in FY 2002, and instructed the Secretary of HHS to give special consideration to TLP applicants seeking to serve pregnant and parenting youth.

Teen Parent Provisions Introduced in 2001

House

- The late Rep. Patsy Mink (D-HI) introduced the TANF Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3113) in October, which included a provision to eliminate the requirement that teen parents participate in high school or another equivalent program in order to qualify for TANF eligibility. The bill also included a provision to eliminate the minor parent living arrangement rule.
- Rep. Mark Souder (R-IN) introduced the Charitable Giving and Compassion Assistance Act in December. Much like the CARE Acts of 2002 and 2003, the bill would have authorized \$33 million for maternity group homes under RHYA.

Senate

- Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND) introduced the Second Chance Homes Promotion Act (S. 1522) in October, a stand-alone bill on second chance homes. The bill would have provided \$45 million for FY 2002 in competitive grants for group homes serving teen mothers.

APPENDIX

Improving Access to TANF for Teen Parents: Recommendations for Reauthorization

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Background

Teen parents may receive their own Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) assistance grants if they meet certain eligibility criteria. Like their older counterparts, teen parents must agree to adhere to certain rules. In addition, the TANF statute has two rules that apply only to minor parents (typically, those under 18 years of age.) The **minor parent education/training rule** prohibits states from awarding TANF cash grants to minor parents unless they are participating in education or training activities. The **minor parent living arrangement rule** prohibits states from awarding TANF cash grants to minor parents unless they are living with a parent, legal guardian, or another adult relative, or in a living arrangement approved by the state. In addition, the 6-month lifetime assistance time clock ticks for a minor parent who is *either* a head of household or married to a head of household.

Issues

Teen parents are experiencing barriers to accessing and remaining in the TANF program. Among those obstacles:

- **Complex Rules**—In some communities, income-eligible teen parents are not getting the help they need to comply with program rules and in some instances they are even being shut out from receiving applications. These unintended consequences appear largely due to caseworker and teen parent misinterpretation of the minor parent rules.
- **Restricted Living Arrangement Requirements**—The minor parent living arrangement rule has discouraged some minor parents who are unable to live with parents, guardians, or other adult relatives from applying for TANF assistance for fear of being confined to or returned to unsafe homes. Also, some states have not acted vigorously enough to provide alternative living arrangements.
- **Educational Limitations**—The TANF law limits how many recipients can participate in vocational education and still be considered participating in work; they are also limited to 12 months of participation. As a result, adults and teen parents compete for a limited number of vocational education slots. In addition, teen parents ought to be able to participate in post-secondary education if such participation is deemed appropriate for their situation.
- **Premature Time Clock**—The 60-month lifetime limit on TANF assistance takes effect for teen parents who are participating in education and training activities upon turning age 19, even when these parents are still completing the education required of them when they entered TANF as minors. These older teens are forced to choose between completing their education/training or exiting TANF prematurely (and thus losing cash assistance to care for their children) to avoid commencement of the lifetime limit on TANF assistance.
- **Disproportionate Sanctioning**—In some states, teen parents appear to be disproportionately sanctioned compared to TANF families overall.

In addition to the obstacles faced by teen parents, states also face challenges. There is limited information on the number of teen parents nationwide who may be eligible for TANF services, as well as the effects of TANF policies on these young families. This can hinder states' abilities to adequately gauge how to best assist such families.

- **Gap in State Plans**—Current TANF law does not provide an adequate picture of the capacity of states to meet the service needs of teen parents.
- **Lack of Information**—There is limited information about the number, characteristics, and well-being of teen parents and their children, both those enrolled in TANF and those not enrolled in the program. Studies should be conducted that collect more demographic information about teen parent families and that better measure the efficacy of TANF policies.

Recommendations

To remedy the unintended consequences of the minor parent rules and to strengthen the TANF program for teen parents and their children, the undersigned organizations recommend the following changes to the TANF statute:

Complex Rules

- Permit states to establish a “transitional compliance period,” whereby income-eligible minor parents who at the time of application are having trouble meeting the complex rules and eligibility conditions related to education and living arrangements (such as school dropouts and homeless youth) are nevertheless allowed to receive assistance on the condition that they comply with the minor parent rules within an established period after enrollment.

Living Arrangement

- Ensure that states consult with minor parents about their preferred living arrangement;
- Ensure the appropriate provision of alternative living arrangements for minor parents unable to live at home; and
- Identify transitional living youth projects for older homeless youth funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) as a type of alternative living arrangement.

Education

- End restrictions on states' ability to count participation in vocational and post-secondary training as a strategy for helping parents, including teen parents, attain access to better jobs; and
- Allow 24 months for such participation.

Time Clock

- Commence the lifetime limit on TANF assistance for teen parents completing their education and training programs when they turn age 20, rather than when they turn age 19, in order to allow these older youth to complete their education/training without the lifetime limit clock ticking.

Sanctions Protections

- Establish sanctions protections procedures that help teen parents understand, avoid, and/or end sanctions.

State Plans

- Require the identification of the extent of and strategies to address the unmet service and living arrangement needs of teen parent in state TANF plans.

Research Studies

- Require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct studies of teen parents receiving TANF assistance and state and community best practices related to teen parent enrollment and tracking; teen parents not receiving TANF assistance to identify reasons for non-participation and to measure indicators of family well-being; the effects of paternity establishment policies; and the nature, extent, and impact of sanctions imposed on parents who have not attained age 20.

ENDNOTES

¹ Shapiro, D., & Marcy, H. (November, 2002). *Knocking on the Door: Barriers to Welfare and Other Assistance for Teen Parents. A Three-City Research Study*. Chicago: Center for Impact Research; Reeg, B., Grisham, C., & Shepard, A. (2002). *Families on the Edge: Homeless Young Parents and Their Welfare Experiences. A Survey of Homeless Youth and Service Providers*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy and National Network for Youth.

² Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (May, 2003). *Review of Sanction Policies and Research Studies—Final Literature Review*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; Duffy, J., & Levin-Epstein, J. (2002, April). *Add It Up: Teen Parents and Welfare... Undercounted, Oversanctioned and Underserved*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

³ Here, the two terms are used interchangeably because the bills/statutes reviewed do not appear to make a distinction.

⁴ For more information on the TANF minor parent living arrangement and education/training rules, see the CLASP publications “Reauthorization Issues: The Minor Parent Living Arrangement Provision” and “Reauthorization Issues: The Education/Training Requirement for TANF Teen Parents” at http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs_Health.

⁵ For more information on other provisions introduced and discussed during the reauthorization process, see the series of CLASP legislative “side-by-sides,” which compare provisions across various bills/proposals with current law. To access the documents, go to CLASP’s webpage http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs_Reauth.

⁶ The bill also allots the TLP a larger proportion of funding relative to the Basic Center Program within the consolidated appropriation for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs. The share of the consolidated appropriation going to TLP would rise from 30 percent to between 45 and 55 percent.