

Department of Health and Human Services Briefing to the Health and Human Services Committee Legislative Reports and the TANF – ASPIRE Program

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Director Anthony Pelotte, Office for Family Independence

September 2021



Presentation Agenda

- Introduction
- Overview of Legislative Reports
 - Measures of Economic Security Report
 - Systems Improvement Work Group Report
- Looking Forward
 - ASPIRE Program
 - Request for Proposals (RFP) for future services

Measures of Economic Security

Statutory Objectives:

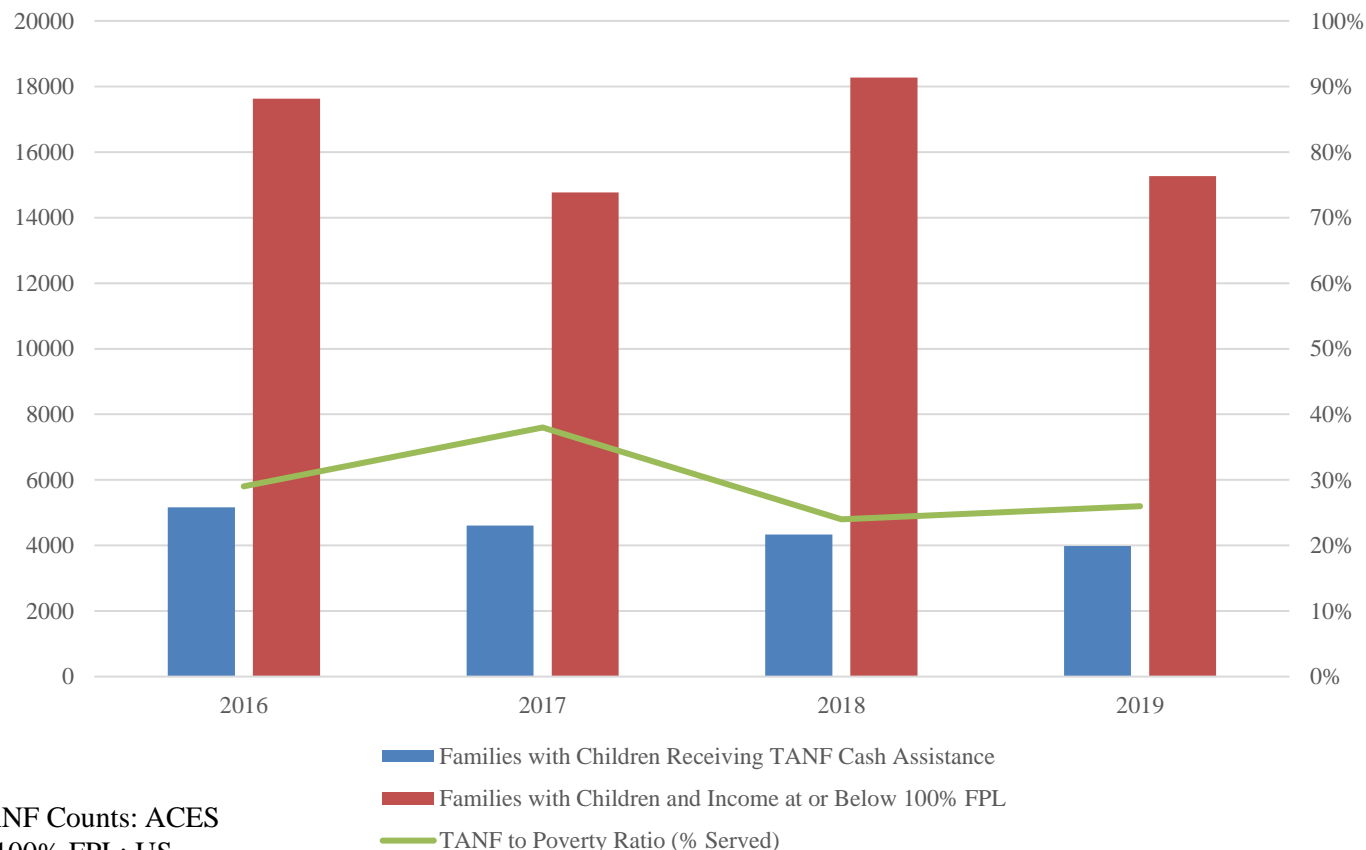
Provide Data on the Following:

- A. Ratio of Families with Children Receiving TANF and Families with Children and Income at or below 100% at the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)
- B. Percentage of Children Under 5 Years of Age Receiving TANF and WIC
- C. Percentage of Children Under 5 years of Age Receiving Food Supplement Program Benefits and WIC
- D. Employment Outcomes for Families for whom TANF Cash Assistance has Terminated
- E. Highest Level of Educational Attainment of Adult Parents or Caretaker Relatives Receiving TANF Cash Assistance or Prior Year Participation Termination
- F. Age and Disabled Breakdown of Persons Receiving Food Supplement Assistance to Those Potentially Eligible for Food Supplement Assistance
- G. Highest Level of Educational Attainment of Adult Parents or Caretaker Relatives Receiving Food Supplement Assistance
- H. The ratio of people participating in the MaineCare program, by eligibility group, to the total number of potentially eligible persons within each group
- I. MaineCare and CHIP Application Processing by CY 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019
- J. and K. Data on Calls to the Office for Family Independence

Policy and Program Considerations in Response to the Data

Measures of Economic Security

Ratio of Families with Children at or Below 100% FPL to Families with Children Served by TANF



Data Details: TANF Counts: ACES
Families Below 100% FPL: US
Census Bureau, 1-Year American
Community Survey

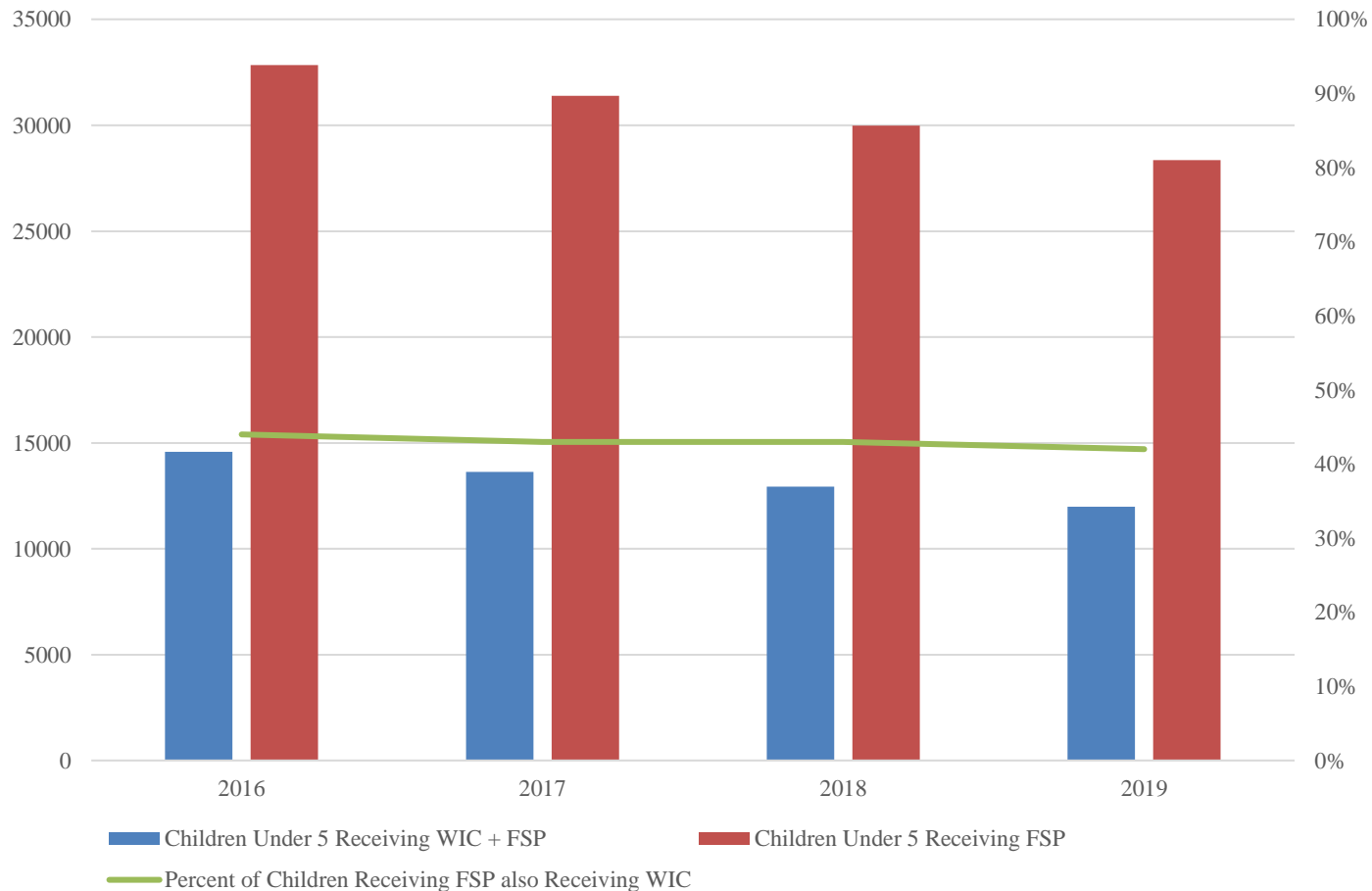
Measures of Economic Security

Children Under 5 Years Old Receiving TANF and WIC Benefits



Measures of Economic Security

Children Under 5 Years Old Receiving Food Supplement Program and WIC Benefits



Measures of Economic Security

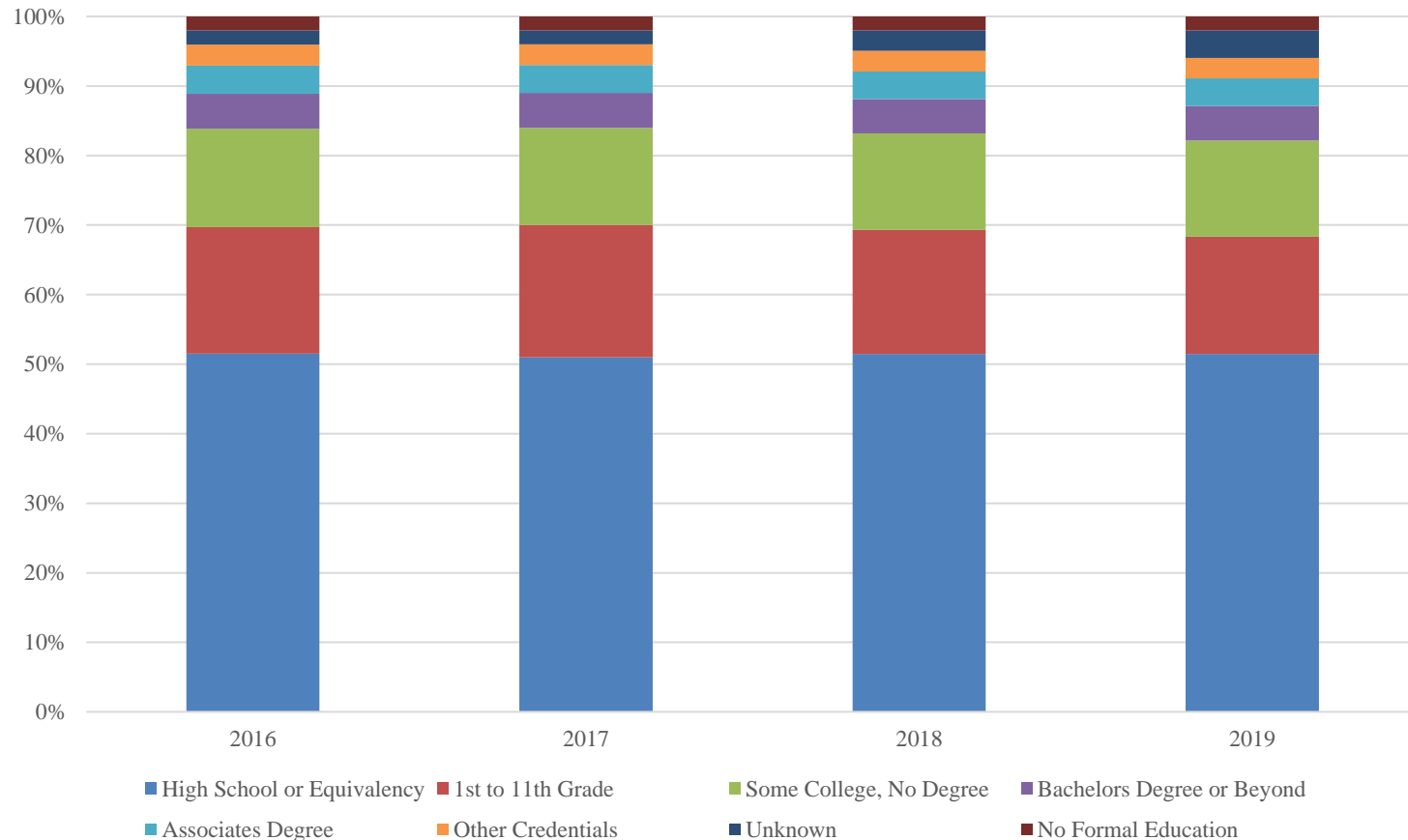
Number and percentage of families with no quarterly earnings after TANF cash assistance has terminated

	At Termination			Quarter 2			Quarter 3		
	#	Total	%	#	Total	%	#	Total	%
2016	2,516	4,739	53%	2,495	4,739	53%	2,511	4,739	53%
2017	2,069	4,032	52%	2,104	4,032	52%	2,044	4,032	51%
2018	1,878	3,928	48%	1,998	3,928	51%	2,005	3,928	51%
2019	1,591	3,436	46%						

Data Details: This section includes all applicable households where DOL reports \$0 in quarterly earnings.

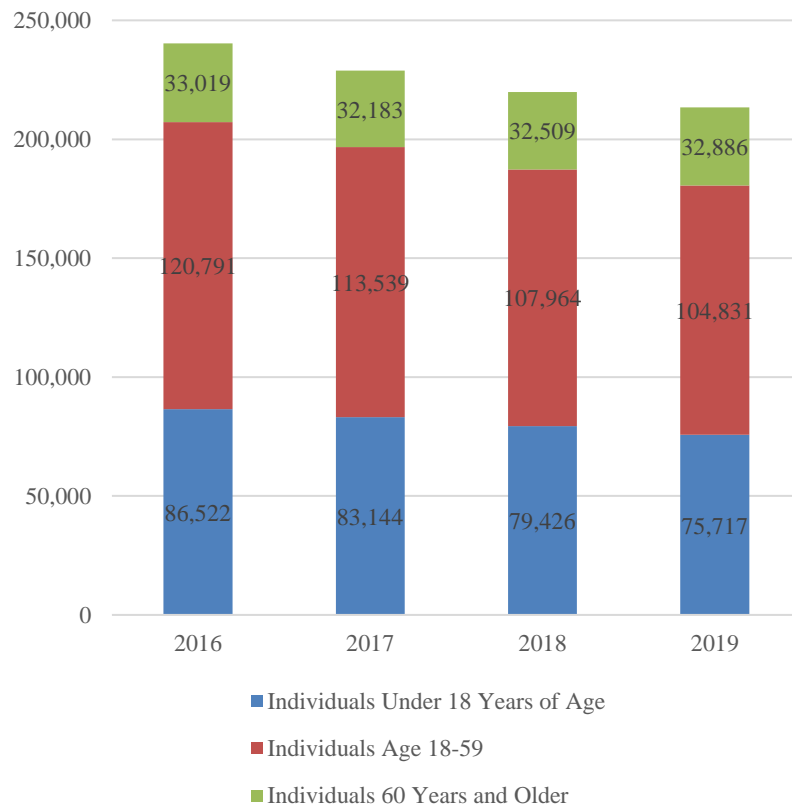
Measures of Economic Security

Adult Parents and Caretaker Relative TANF Cash Assistance Recipients by Educational Attainment

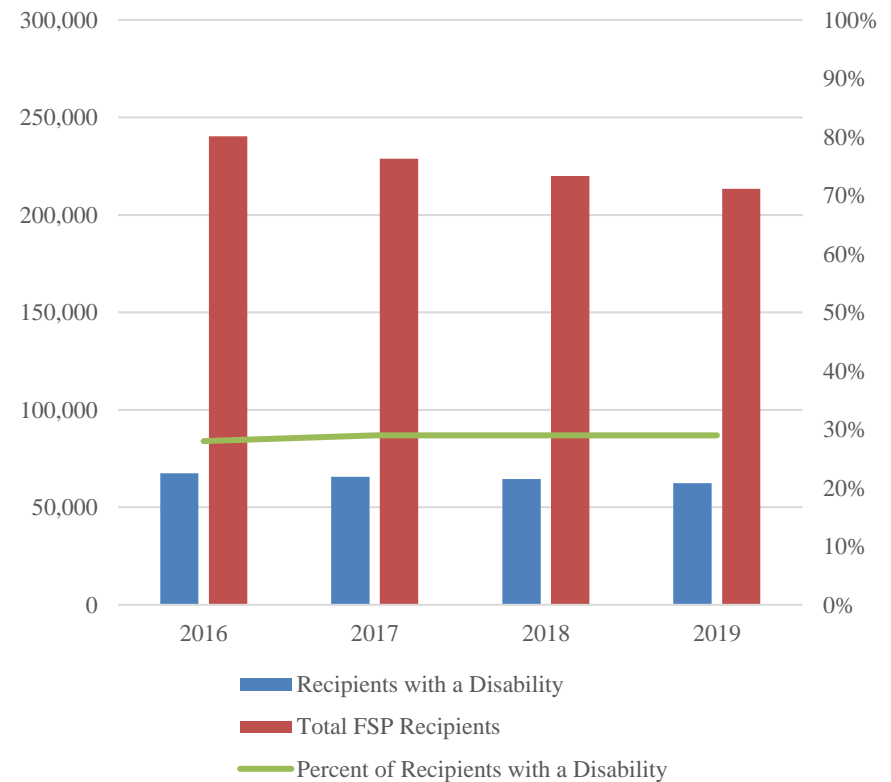


Measures of Economic Security

Food Supplement Recipients by Age

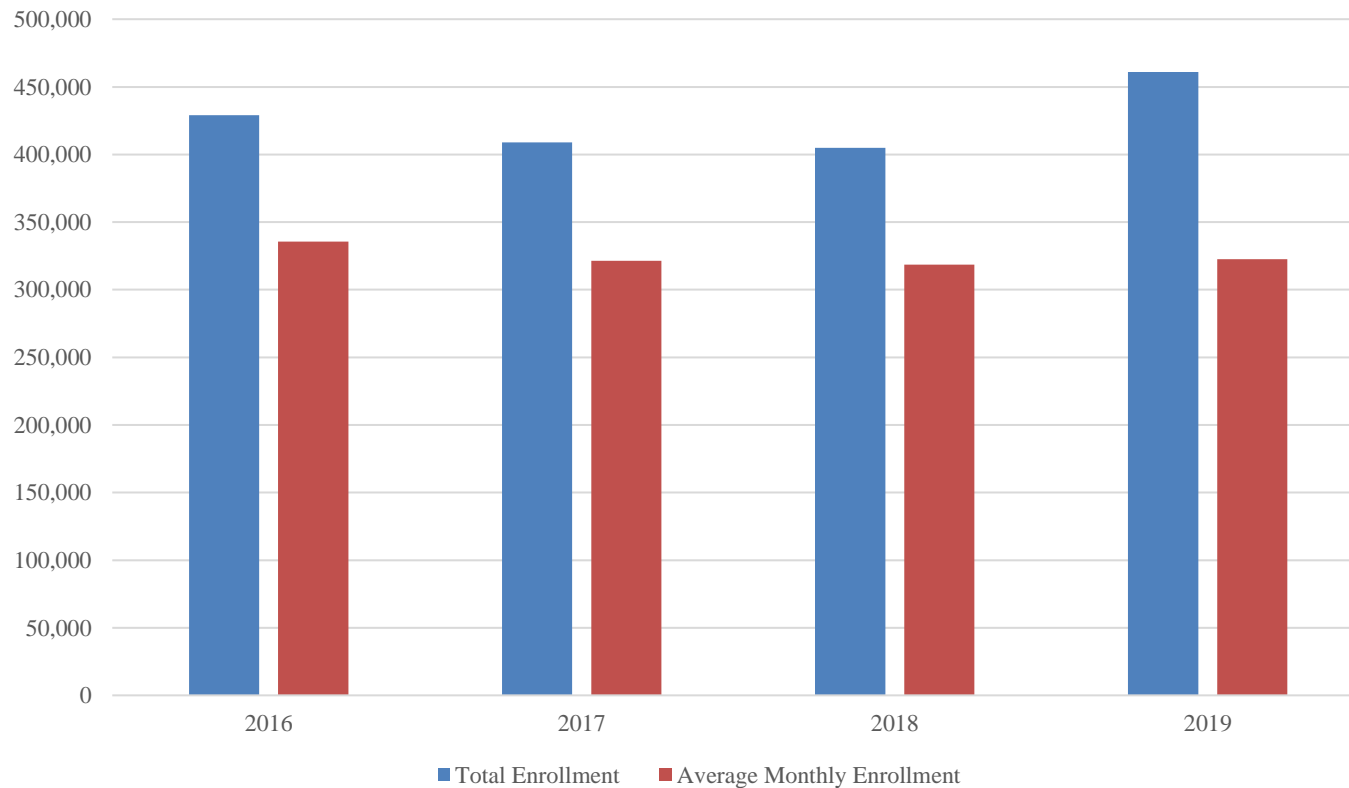


Percent of Food Supplement Recipients with a Disability



Measures of Economic Security

MaineCare Enrollment (All Coverage Groups)



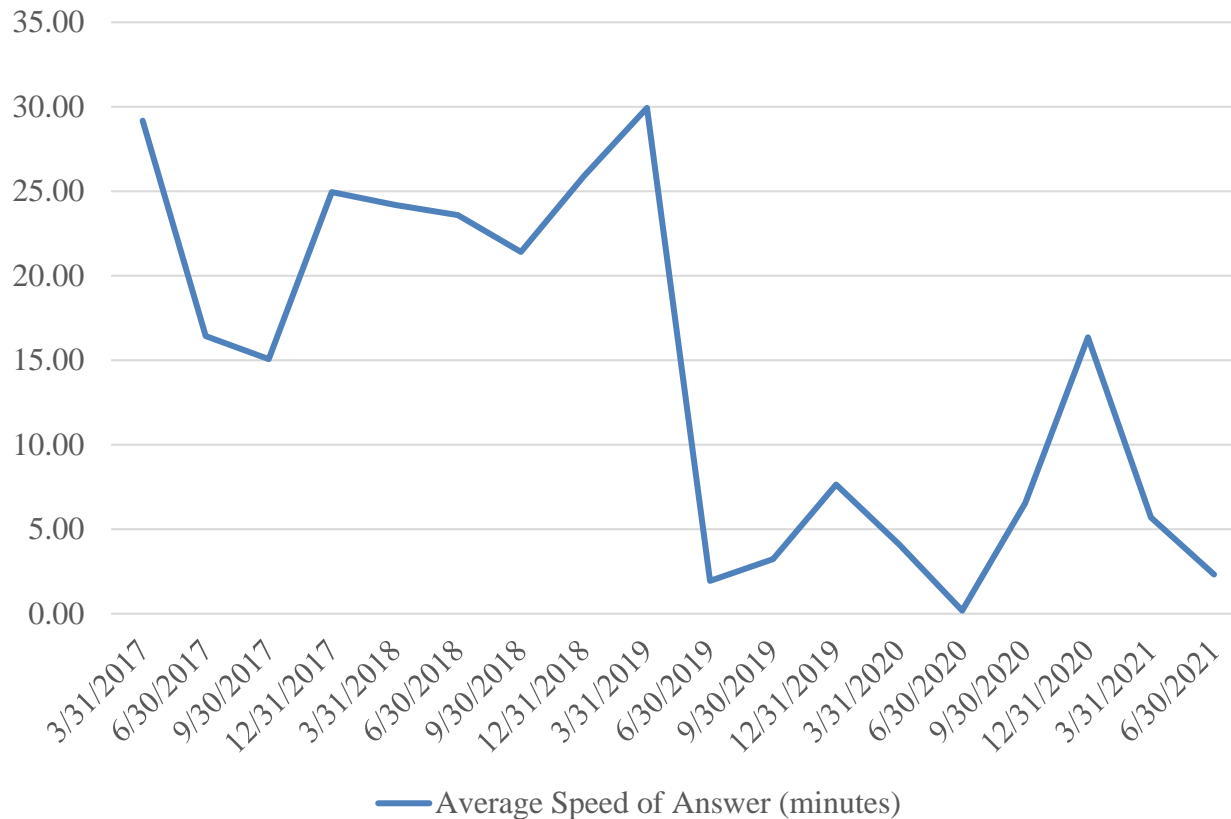
Measures of Economic Security

Cub Care (CHIP) Application Processing Times

Timeliness	2016	2017	2018	2019
<24 Hours	25%	23%	22%	19%
1-7 Days	7%	5%	6%	6%
8-30 Days	29%	27%	25%	32%
31-45 Days	8%	9%	8%	12%
>45 Days	31%	37%	40%	32%
Total Applications	793	980	901	1,126

Measures of Economic Security

Average Waiting Times to Speak with a Person at DHHS Call Center



Measures of Economic Security

Program and Policy Considerations:

Identifying Opportunities for Program Improvements

COVID-19 Policy Changes: as the focus of this report is on the long-term operation and success of public assistance programs, the forthcoming slides do not include short-term/time-limited changes made during the COVID-19 pandemic to address the unique circumstances of Maine families during this time. Briefly, these changes have included (but are not limited to):

- Issuance of maximum allowable SNAP benefits based on housing size (federally-supported option)
- Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (PEBT) - School lunch and breakfast benefits issued
- Increased Worker Supplement Benefit (food assistance) from \$50 to \$100 monthly
- Suspension of program sanctions in TANF
- Continued MaineCare assistance for most households regardless of circumstances
- MaineCare assistance premiums have been waived
- Waiving of in-person requirements and implemented electronic signature option for applications
- Sought and received a statewide waiver for work requirements for SNAP program

Measures of Economic Security

Program and Policy Considerations: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/TANF

Eliminated the Full Family Sanction: with the support of the Legislature, submitted and passed a Department bill to eliminate full family sanctions (PL 2021, Ch. 97)

Updating Program Rules: rules around extensions to the TANF lifetime limit are currently being drafted to:

- Remove the express 35-hour per week requirement and replace it with a standard tied to the TANF work hours requirements based on the family
- Expand and amend the definition of “emergency” situations to encourage a more reasonable application of this provision
- Improve and clarify policy related to adults with disabilities

Expanded the definition of eligible adult to include non-blood relatives in whose care a qualifying child is (such as legal guardians and Indian Custodians)

Whole Family Services: working with 11 agencies statewide to implement whole family (also known as “two-gen”) family-centered coaching services to improve wraparound supports and help prioritize the family’s goals for economic stability

Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE) improvements: with the Legislature’s support, increased the program cap to 800 students and expanded the eligible courses of study

Measures of Economic Security

Program and Policy Considerations: Food Supplement/SNAP

Online Purchasing: recipients can use their benefits for delivery or curbside pickup at Wal-Mart, BJ's, Hannaford, and other enrolled retailers across the state

Asset Limit Changes: the Administration utilized its authority to remove asset limits for older and disabled populations. Earlier this year, the Legislature eliminated asset limits for all people through Res. 2021, Ch. 115

Support for Post-Secondary Students: OFI increased access to SNAP for post-secondary students by offering a form to attest to their course of study to receive SNAP without meeting additional work requirements

EBT Card Improvements: ended the use of photos on EBT cards

Measures of Economic Security

Program and Policy Considerations: MaineCare

MaineCare Expansion: expanded eligibility for the MaineCare program through the Affordable Care Act to ensure that more adults in Maine have access to health care coverage and services to support healthy and stable lives. In August 2021, over 81,950 people were actively enrolled through MaineCare expansion. Through June 2021, over 46,500 adults received mental health treatment and over 17,000 adults received substance use disorder treatment.

Improvements to Presumptive Eligibility: currently promulgating rules and finalizing procedures to provide expanded presumptive eligibility for families, children, pregnant people, and other income-eligible individuals

Limiting Estate Recovery: limited estate recovery to the federal minimum through the biennial budget, PL 2021, Ch. 398 to ensure it is not a deterrent for individuals over 55 to apply for Medicaid coverage

Expanding Coverage: provided coverage to children and pregnant people regardless of citizenship status in biennial budget

Measures of Economic Security

Program and Policy Considerations: Multi-Program Initiatives

Benefits Cliff Calculator: working with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta to develop a Maine-specific Family Resources Dashboard and a Family Financial Planner tool to depict wages along select career pathways and indicate potential barriers posed by benefits cliffs. The tool also provides the long-run *public* returns to moving individuals up the career pathway: Net taxpayer savings to career advancement.

IMPAQ Evaluation: IMPAQ is working with the Department to evaluate the outcome of the policies implemented under the LIFT legislation and the HOPE program.

Pre-release Applications for Justice-Involved Individuals: allowing individuals to apply for MaineCare while incarcerated (limited services while incarcerated) and food supplement/SNAP up to 30 days prior to release from incarceration. DHHS and DOC are working together to ensure access to these applications and services

Improved Staff Training: Ensure uniform administration of rules through enhanced staff training conducted by OFI's training team.

Notice of Decision Modernization: improved notification and explanation of eligibility decisions

Measures of Economic Security

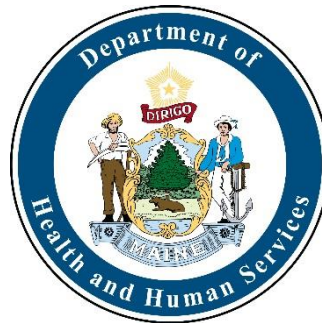
Upcoming Initiatives:

While the initiatives on the previous slide are ongoing, DHHS will soon be working on:

- Addition of education navigator services for Parents as Scholars students, in addition to those services which are provided to HOPE participants
- Preliminary assessment of the Whole Family Services contracts
- Implementing replacement of My Maine Connection tool
- Expanding Transitional Transportation Services to employed families who may not have received TANF in the past (per biennial budget).

Questions?

Report #1 Measures of Child and Family Economic Security



Systems Improvement Work Group

Statutory Objectives:

- A. Review opportunities to simplify operations and improve business processes that facilitate cross-enrollment and linkages connecting eligible persons enrolled in one program to other core services available to them related to health care, nutrition and help meeting basic needs;
- B. Examine the potential for improved electronic data sharing between department programs to streamline and promote efficiencies in verification processes required for eligibility and recertification determinations;
- C. Review state policy and procedural options available under federal law to improve or increase access to services to reduce food insecurity and improve the health and well-being of persons in the State living in poverty;
- D. Investigate ways to transform the department into a more holistic and person-centered and better coordinated human services system with an approach that puts the varying needs of persons and families first and ensures more efficient access, clarity of information and respectful interactions;
- E. Determine the extent to which the department could facilitate enrollment for families and persons receiving its services in programs administered by other agencies of State Government, including low-income home energy assistance benefits and the property tax fairness credit under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 36, section 5219-KK; and
- F. Make recommendations related to improvement targets for reduced levels of poverty and food insecurity and improved health outcomes to be considered by the department as it establishes improvement targets pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, section 3109, subsection 3.

Systems Improvement Work Group

Participants:

Abdullahi Ali, Gateway Community Service

Em Burnett, Code for America

Stephanie Chase, Former Recipient

Ann Danforth, Maine Equal Justice

Rita Furlow, Maine Children's Alliance

Amy Gallant, Good Shepherd Food Bank

Moriah Geer, Maine Equal Justice

Chris Hastedt, Maine Equal Justice

Fatuma Hussein, United Somali Women of Maine

Andrea Mancuso, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence

Shannon McHarg

Flavia Olivera, Maine Equal Justice Intern and Former Recipient

Robyn Young, Dartmouth College

Heather Zimmerman, Preble Street Housing

DHHS Representatives: Bethany Hamm, Leana Amaez, Molly Bogart,

Anthony Pelotte, Ian Miller, Dave Simsarian

Systems Improvement Work Group

Subgroups

People & Process

- Ensure services are holistic, and person-centered, and well-coordinated
- Person- and family-first approach
- Efficient access to clear information
- Respectful interactions with clients
- Explore whether and how DHHS can facilitate enrollment in programs outside the Department

Technology

- Explore how to simplify operations and improve business processes for cross-enrollment and other program linkages
- Examine improved electronic data sharing between programs
- Explore whether and how DHHS can facilitate enrollment in programs outside the Department

Policy

- Review state policy and federal options for improving access to services to reduce food insecurity and improve the health and well-being of persons in poverty
- Recommend improvement targets for reduced levels of poverty and food insecurity and improved health outcomes

Systems Improvement Work Group

People & Process Key Recommendations:

Improve Engagement with and Understanding of Communities Served: build a structure for meaningful and regular engagement with communities of color, immigrant communities and other underserved groups, ensure that DHHS workers visit hard to reach communities, partner with community-led organizations, improve language access, translation of resources and quality of interpretation in appropriate dialects.

Better Understand Individuals Accessing Programs: Collect and analyze data related to poverty, hunger, homelessness including the extent to which these conditions exist for Black/African American persons; American Indians; Hispanic/Latino; non-Hispanic White individuals, persons with limited literacy or English language proficiency, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals and those who have experienced trauma

Expand Staff Training: Implement ongoing training for staff to promote cultural understanding and competency, including issues of implicit bias, to build a climate of equity and inclusion

Increase the Number of Individuals Served: Increase the number of people served in under-resourced, disproportionately impacted, and new communities, including establishing more equitable policies relating to TANF, Food Supplement, Child Care, MaineCare and other benefits for those who would be eligible but their immigrant status

Increase Efficiency of Processes: Improve inter- and intra-departmental communications to make Department processes more efficient and reduce the potential for clients' emotional burden and trauma

Systems Improvement Work Group

People & Process Work by the Department:

CORE Training

- To build and support a climate of diversity, equity and inclusion, the OFI requires staff participate in the *CORE: a Culture of Respect and Empathy* training program.
- This two-part foundational professional ethics and diversity training is grounded in fostering a respectful DHHS workplace – both with clients and among staff.
- The program covers concepts of culture, world view, diversity, bias, microaggressions, and self-care in order to encourage self-reflection and conversation.
- In a post training survey, 94% of *CORE* participants (1,367 to date) stated they are more likely to think about the impact of their actions with clients and peers at work after attending the training.

Collaboration with Community Based Organizations (CBOs)

- Began and continue to collaborate with over 30 Community Based Organizations (CBO) and agencies to increase access to services for under-resourced communities

Social Supports

- Over 10,000 Mainers so far have been provided various supports that include: food, safe quarantine and isolation space, transportation and many other services.

Listening sessions and community engagement

- Held listening sessions to help inform the ASPIRE RFP with agencies and CBOs.

Systems Improvement Work Group

Technology Key Recommendations:

Simplify online applications and improve application features: ensure applications are “device agnostic” and work equally well across devices including mobile phones, allow uploading and scanning supporting documents directly from phones and tablets, ensure access to case status and progress tracking, shorten the time it takes and reduce the number of fields required to complete an application, improve the online recertification process, enable text notifications, add an online chat feature, and more.

Streamline application processes to promote enrollment in underutilized public programs: streamline the WIC eligibility determination and recertification processes using Food Supplement and/or MaineCare as a proxy for financial eligibility, allow for eligibility determination through My Maine Connection, use Food Supplement eligibility as a proxy for Child Care Subsidy Program eligibility, allow for express lane eligibility for Medicaid and CHIP for children, integrate the LIHEAP program to My Maine Connection, improve access to state tax credits through My Maine Connection, use state income tax filings to streamline enrollment into MaineCare and CHIP.

Systems Improvement Work Group

Technology Work by the Department:

- **My Maine Connection Replacement** – OFI is in the process of developing a full replacement of the My Maine Connection platform and application, with a service that:
 - Is device agnostic, and is specifically designed for intuitive use on mobile phones
 - Allows clients to upload verification documents
 - Includes “dynamic question flow,” which only asks questions relevant to the programs selected and modifies the questions asked based on answers given in real time, to provide a more user-friendly and streamlined experience
 - Pre-populates information known in ACES for the client to review/modify, for a quicker experience and to reduce data-entry errors, during application/recertification/change reporting etc.
 - Includes functionality for clients to fill out and submit a six-month report for SNAP and apply for long term care MaineCare
 - Automatically imports certain data entered on the portal to ACES, for more efficient worker processing
 - Connects directly to the Federal Data Services Hub (FDSH) for real-time verification of key MaineCare eligibility requirements
 - Facilitates and displays a real-time eligibility decision for MaineCare in certain circumstances

Systems Improvement Work Group

Key Policy Recommendations:

Food Supplement (SNAP)

- repeal child support-related disqualifications
- repeal “comparable disqualifications”
- prevent disqualification of chronically homeless individuals otherwise subject to the 3-month limit by determining them as “unfit for employment” pursuant to federal guidance
- implement the SNAP “12% exemptions”
- increase access to SNAP for needy students,
- eliminate the SNAP asset test for all people
- repeal the requirement for photos on EBT cards

Program Administration

- ensure uniform administration of rules
- address issues with SAVE system denials
- facilitate fee waivers where allowable
- establish a uniform practice of consulting with knowledgeable immigration experts when creating rules, guidance, and other policy related to immigration status

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

- eliminate full family sanctions
- remove the express 35-hour per week requirement and replace it with a standard tied to the TANF work hours requirements
- amend loss of job exemption for extensions
- expand and amend the definition of “emergency” situations to encourage a more reasonable application of this provision
- improve and clarify policy related to adults with disabilities
- include high school completion and English as a second language programs as qualifying for extensions
- Support asylum-seeking families through the child care subsidy program

MaineCare

- extend presumptive eligibility
- Limit estate recovery policy to limit to federal minimum
- eliminate the 3-month waiting period for CHIP
- expand the definition of Emergency Medical Condition for people not eligible for MaineCare due to immigration status

Systems Improvement Work Group

Policy Developments Since Report:

Food Supplement (SNAP)

- The Administration utilized its authority to remove asset limits for older and disabled populations.
- The Legislature eliminated asset limits for all people through Resolves 2021, Ch. 115
- Increased access to post-secondary students by offering a form to attest to their course of study to receive SNAP without meeting additional work requirements
- Ended the use of photos on EBT cards

MaineCare

- Currently promulgating rules and finalizing procedures to provide expanded presumptive eligibility for families, children, pregnant people, and other income-eligible individuals
- Limited estate recovery to the federal minimum through the biennial budget, PL 2021, Ch. 398
- Provided coverage to children and pregnant people regardless of citizenship status in biennial budget

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

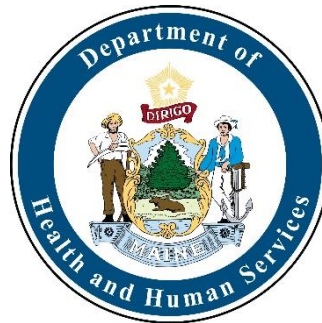
- Submitted and passed a Department bill to eliminate full family sanctions (PL 2021, Ch. 97)
- Rules around extensions to the TANF lifetime limit are currently being drafted to:
 - remove the express 35-hour per week requirement and replace it with a standard tied to the TANF work hours requirements based on the family
 - expand and amend the definition of “emergency” situations to encourage a more reasonable application of this provision
 - improve and clarify policy related to adults with disabilities

Program Administration

- Ensure uniform administration of rules through enhanced staff training conducted by OFI’s training team.
- Considering clarifications to the SAVE program rule based on recommendations in this report and stakeholder engagement

Questions?

Report #2 Work Group on Systems Improvement



ASPIRE Program

History of the Current ASPIRE Program Contract with Fedcap

- Contract initially awarded in 2016
- March 2019: Mills Administration outlined concerns with Fedcap's performance and services in a letter. Fedcap responded and work began to improve upon areas of concern.
- CSG conducted a third-party evaluation of Fedcap's quality of services, focusing specifically on areas of concern outlined in the March 2019 letter.
- Contract amendments made based on stakeholder feedback and results of the CSG evaluation and recommendations.

ASPIRE Program

DHHS Oversight of the ASPIRE Contract with Fedcap

- The Senior Program Manager for TANF-ASPIRE monitors the contractual obligations and quality of Fedcap's work statewide and meets regularly with Fedcap's Maine Executive Director.
- The ASPIRE Program Manager monitors support service requests that Fedcap submits on each client's behalf and escalated constituent issues.
- There are currently 10 ASPIRE Regional Planners doing in-depth regional level quality reviews which include
 - 50 Quality Reviews (random cases reviewed) and 50 random participant surveys per month. All findings are presented to the leadership team (Fedcap state, ed follow up efforts. regional, and DHHS staff) for any required follow up
 - Annual Performance Observations that track the process from orientation to current client status, as well as office requirements.
- Monthly operations meetings are held with leadership from both Fedcap and OFI.
- Two Senior Planners review all TANF Extensions (for receipt past the 60-month lifetime limit) and sanction requests. This activity provides state oversight on all Fedcap actions that may directly impact a client's TANF or PaS benefit level.

ASPIRE Program

Tracking and Investigating Complaints and Concerns

- Complaints are received by ASPIRE Regional Planners and the ASPIRE Program Manager for resolution and documentation. Regional Planners track any contact from stakeholders and share all outcomes with the OFI ASPIRE team for identification of trends and coaching and training opportunities.
- Monthly survey results are shared with both OFI ASPIRE and Fedcap leadership.

ASPIRE Program

Improvements to ASPIRE Services

- **Program Pathways:** Enhanced program options and career planning tools to –
 - Emphasize careers that provide family sustaining wages;
 - Promote enrollment in secondary education and training including the Parents as Scholars program; and
 - Provide a more measured approach for helping those with significant barriers such as mental health issues, homelessness, substance use disorders, domestic violence, and others prior to career planning.
- **Assessment:** Launching CASAS assessment for more informed career planning and to expedite enrollment into HiSet, GED, ESOL and job training programs offered through the Adult Education and Workforce Development systems.
- **New supports for New Mainers:** Translated orientation materials, the GEAR Program with Catholic Charities for cultural navigation services co-located in Fedcap offices, new partnership with Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center for contextualized English for Employment services and targeted recruitment for additional multi-lingual staff members (added seven so far).
- **Staffing Enhancements:** New staff job titles and refined roles to better promote careers and be responsive to the populations we serve, including adding new positions which focus on Assessment and Education, New Mainer Services, Case Management and Partner Engagement.
- **Program Name and Branding:** Changed Breaking the Cycle to *Families Forward* to better capture the Two-Generational approach to helping TANF families achieve a more economically secure future through access to education, training, and community resources.

ASPIRE Program

Looking Forward

- Department is currently developing the (routine) RFP for these services after the current contract expires in September 2022.

Program Re-design

- Family Coaching model
- Restorative practices
- Trauma-informed approaches
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate service delivery
- Hybrid service delivery model (DHHS delivered services and vendor delivered services)
- Heightened focus on two major pathways: Education or Job Placement

Questions?

