

Approved by US DHHS
Administration for Children and Families
June 13, 2011

Alaska State Plan
for the
Temporary Assistance
for
Needy Families Program



Office of the Governor
and
Department of Health and Social Services
Juneau, Alaska

December 31, 2010

TANF STATE PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

⌘

In May 1996, the Alaska State legislature created the **Alaska Temporary Assistance Program**. Temporary Assistance replaced the welfare programs Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and JOBS. That same year, the Federal government enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996. This act provides for the **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families** (TANF) block grant. Temporary Assistance, implemented in 1997, is funded through a combination of state funds and TANF block grant.

The TANF State Plan is required in order for Alaska to receive federal block grant funds. The State Plan describes major program provisions and outlines who is eligible, program participation requirements, and program benefits.

All needy Alaskan families with dependent children may apply to participate in the Temporary Assistance Program. To qualify, families establish eligibility based on family composition and need. To continue to participate in the program, parents or caretaker relatives must participate in work activities within two years.

The Temporary Assistance Program has requirements not found in earlier welfare programs. Families may receive cash benefits for only 60 months (5 years) unless the family qualifies for a time-limit exemption. Temporary Assistance uses the "Work First" approach to promote family self-sufficiency. Families build on their strengths and actively seek employment. A family completes their own Family Self-sufficiency Plan, and an

employment assessment. Families must participate in work activities, complete their self-sufficiency plan, and cooperate with child support enforcement. Minor teen parents must live with a parent or other approved living arrangement and continue their education.

Temporary Assistance includes cash benefits to help pay for basic living expenses while a family makes progress toward economic independence through employment. Temporary Assistance may purchase or reimburse the costs of services determined necessary to support work activities such as childcare, transportation and job related training.

Temporary Assistance promotes strong partnerships with local governments, Native organizations, non-profit and profit organizations in an effort to promote jobs and identify effective community work experience.

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services evaluates the Temporary Assistance program by using data-based performance measures of success. These measures include the number of adults with earnings, the number who retain employment and increase their earnings, and the number who leave assistance with employment and do not return.

Effective: December 31, 2010

⌘
Alaska
Temporary
Assistance Goal
*Move Alaskans
from welfare into
jobs so they can
support their
families,
and maintain a
safety net for those
truly in need.*
⌘

State of Alaska
TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE
 For
NEEDY FAMILIES
STATE PLAN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	3
1.	GOALS	3
1.1	Central Principles	3
2	PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT	4
2.1	Welfare Reform Implementation Community Forms	5
2.2	Recipient Implementation Meetings	5
2.3	Legislative Committee Meetings and Hearings.....	5
2.4	Administrative Regulation Hearings	5
2.5	TANF State Plan Public Process	6
2.6	Welfare Reform Community Meetings	6
2.7	Additional Opportunities for Public Involvement	6
II.	ALASKA TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE MAJOR PROVISIONS	7
3	ELIGIBLE FAMILIES.....	7
3.1	Dependent Child	7
3.2	Residency	7
3.3	Equitable Access.....	8
3.4	Non-citizens	8
3.5	60-Month Time Limit	8
3.6	Program Participant Rights	9
4	ALASKA TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE REQUIREMENTS	9
4.1	Application	9
4.2	Family Self-Sufficiency Plan and Assessment.....	10
4.3	Reporting Requirements.....	10
4.4	Child Support	11
4.5	Minor Parents	11
4.6	Penalties and Sanctions	11
III.	WORK AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY	14
5.	WORK SERVICES DELIVERY	14
5.1	Work First.....	15
5.2	Families First	15
6.	WORK ACTIVITIES.....	16
7.	WORK ACTIVITY EXEMPTIONS	17
7.1	Domestic Violence	17

7.2	Child Care	18
8.	SERVICES PROVIDED.....	19
9.	PROGRAM ASSESSMENT	19
9.1	Administrative Data	19
9.2	Program Evaluation	20
9.3	Long-Term Recipient Study	20
10.	CURRENT WORKERS DISPLACEMENT PROTECTION	20
11.	INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT WELFARE TO WORK	21
11.1	Alaska Workforce Investment Board	21
11.2	Alaska Job Center Network	21
12.	GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAM	21
IV.	ALASKA TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE BENEFITS	22
13.	FAMILY NEED	22
13.1	Resources	22
13.2	Earned Income	23
13.3	Payments.....	23
13.4	Diversion	24
14.	CHILD CARE	24
15.	SUPPORT SERVICES BENEFITS	25
16.	SHELTER	25
17.	BENEFIT DELIVERY	26
18.	PRIVACY.....	26
V.	PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY	27
VI.	NATIVE FAMILY ASSISTANCE	28
VII.	OTHER TANF FUNDED SERVICES	29
19.	PASS III CHILD CARE	29
20.	TRANSPORTATION	30
21.	PREGNANCY PREVENTION	30
22.	SERVICES FOR REFUGEE FAMILIES	31
VIII.	ADMINISTRATION.....	32
1.	ALASKA STATUTE.....	32
2.	DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION OF TANF	32
3.	MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT	32

APPENDICES

Certifications

Funding

Need Standard Tables

Organizational Chart

Other Alaska Pregnancy Prevention Efforts

I. INTRODUCTION

Alaska enacted a statute in 1996 that provides for a comprehensive family assistance program known as the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program. Alaska Temporary Assistance replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. That same year, the Federal government enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 that provides for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. The Alaska Temporary Assistance program is funded through a combination of state funds and the TANF block grant.

This State Plan describes how Alaska's Department of Health and Social Services will operate the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program and other TANF funded services. The Congressional intent of the TANF block grant was to increase the flexibility of States to fund a variety of services for needy families. Alaska has taken advantage of this opportunity to use TANF funds for services that promote parental responsibility, work, reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies and encourage the formation of two-parent families.

1. GOALS

The overarching goal of the Alaska Temporary Assistance program is to:

⌘

Move Alaskans from welfare into jobs so they can support their families and maintain a safety net for those truly in need.

⌘

1.1 CENTRAL PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE ALASKA TOWARD THIS GOAL

❖ Emphasize Work

Alaska places a strong emphasis on work and job readiness by adhering to the Work First philosophy that employment is both the goal and the expectation for Temporary Assistance clients. Alaska is committed to creating job opportunities for recipients in public and private sectors and making work pay.

❖ Promote Responsibility

Alaska encourages family self-sufficiency and stability through a number of initiatives that promote individual responsibility. This includes planning for self-support, actively pursuing child support, and prevention of unplanned and out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

❖ Set Limits

Alaska limits benefits to five years for most families, offers diversion payments to help families avoid dependency, and reduces benefits for two-parent families during the summer when work opportunities increase. The State denies a family benefits if a parent refuses or quits a job, and reduces benefits if a parent does not participate in work and other self-sufficiency activities or fails to cooperate with child support enforcement.

❖ Maintain a Safety Net

Alaska maintains a safety net for needy children and encourages families to care for their children in their own home. The state recognizes that there are welfare recipients for whom employment is not a realistic objective. Alaska will not abandon these families.

2. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services is committed to public involvement in program design and implementation. The Department worked with internal staff, community groups and within various public arenas to inform Alaskans about changes to the welfare system and to listen to suggestions and concerns about welfare reform. Information gathered from the hundreds of people who were involved in these discussions was used to form overall policies and to prepare the welfare reform legislation that created the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program. Since program implementation, continued public involvement has been promoted through information sharing and numerous opportunities for public comment.

Public involvement activities have included:

2.1 WELFARE REFORM IMPLEMENTATION COMMUNITY FORUMS

During the initial design of the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program, the Department conducted fourteen community meetings co-hosted by local governments and community organizations in over a dozen communities ranging in size from Anchorage, population 260,000, to Fort Yukon, population 600. In addition, the Department sponsored four statewide community call-ins and a two-day statewide meeting held in Anchorage. The forums' purpose was to seek public opinion, to communicate to Alaskans information about dramatic changes in the public welfare system and to gather ideas about how to design a responsive social service system in each particular community.

2.2 RECIPIENT IMPLEMENTATION MEETINGS

Private organizations sponsored meetings between State government representatives and groups of recipients at shelters and at community service agencies.

2.3 LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

Public hearings were held in the spring of 1996 related to passage of Alaska Senate Bill 98, Alaska's welfare reform law that created the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program. Amendments to the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program statute were made by the Legislature in 2002, and hearings were held at that time on the provisions changed. In addition, legislative hearings are held each year since enactment to inform the public on the status of welfare reform and to discuss amendments to the statute.

2.4 ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION HEARINGS

Public hearings were held in November 1996 on the welfare reform regulations that implemented the first welfare changes on February 1, 1997. Public hearings were held again in May 1997 on the second and main body of Alaska Temporary Assistance regulations that took effect July 1, 1997. In August 2001, public hearings were held to review regulation changes that took effect October 1, 2001. Additional public hearings were held in the spring and fall of 2002 for regulation changes that were implemented in July and December 2002.

2.5 TANF STATE PLAN PUBLIC PROCESS

Alaskans were offered a 45-day public comment period prior to the original submission of this Plan. Individuals and organizations, including local governments and private sector organizations, were given an opportunity to provide comments through public meetings, teleconferences and to mail-in written responses. In November 1999, January 2002, December 2004, and December 2007 the Plan was recertified, and the public was again given the opportunity to comment on amendments to the Plan.

2.6 WELFARE REFORM COMMUNITY MEETINGS

During January 2001, the Department held a series of statewide community meetings designed to inform the public on plans for the approaching 60-month limit on Alaska Temporary Assistance benefits. These meetings also provided an opportunity to hear from service providers and other community members on the impacts of welfare reform, community programs that have been successful in helping recipients move from welfare to work, and challenges experienced by both recipients and helping agencies.

2.7 ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Department takes advantage of ongoing opportunities to inform and respond to the public through the news media, Internet webpages, participation in talk shows, public forums and meetings sponsored by other groups. All these communication avenues provide the public with information and help gather public opinion and responses to the welfare-to-work programs.

II. ALASKA TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE MAJOR PROVISIONS

The Alaska Temporary Assistance program is available to needy Alaskan families with dependent children who are not eligible for assistance from a Native Family Assistance Program. Participation in Alaska Temporary Assistance requires eligible families to fulfill program obligations such as preparation of a Family Self-Sufficiency Plan and participation in work activities.

3. ELIGIBLE FAMILIES

Families establish program eligibility based on family composition and a determination of need that considers the family's available income and assets. For the purpose of participating in the Alaska Temporary Assistance program, eligible families are:

- ❖ Families that include a caretaker relative of one or more related dependent children.
- ❖ Two-parent families in which both parents live in the same household.
- ❖ Families that include a needy dependent child and a non-needy caretaker relative.

A caretaker relative must be a parent, a woman in the last trimester of her pregnancy, or a relative to child within at least the fifth degree of kinship.

3.1 DEPENDENT CHILD

For purposes of eligibility, a dependent child is a child under 18 years of age. If a child is 18 years of age, he or she may continue to be considered a dependent child if a full-time student in a secondary school or in vocational or technical training.

3.2 RESIDENCY

To be eligible, a family must be living in Alaska with the intent to remain. Alaska does not treat new residents of the state differently than other Alaskan families receiving Alaska Temporary Assistance.

3.3 EQUITABLE ACCESS

All families in the state will have equitable access to Alaska Temporary Assistance; this includes Alaska Native families who are not served by a Native Family Assistance program. There are Public Assistance field offices in all urban areas and regional centers including Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Kotzebue, Wasilla, Eagle River, Nome and Sitka. In addition, there is an active fee agent network in over two hundred small communities. Fee agents accept applications for all Alaska public assistance programs.

3.4 NON-CITIZENS

Alaska will provide Temporary Assistance coverage to otherwise eligible non-citizens classified as “qualified” aliens as defined in 8 U.S.C. 1641. Qualified aliens who arrived in the country prior to the August 22, 1996 enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity may receive assistance immediately upon application for assistance. Qualified aliens who entered the country on or after August 22, 1996 are ineligible for Temporary Assistance for the first five years they reside in the country, unless they are determined to be exempt from the five-year waiting period because of their immigration status (such as a refugee or asylee). In determining eligibility for qualified aliens, a portion of the income and assets of the immigrant’s sponsor are counted. Non-qualified aliens are not eligible for Alaska Temporary Assistance.

3.5 60-MONTH TIME LIMIT

Families are not eligible if the family includes an adult who has received 60 months of assistance from the Alaska Temporary Assistance program, a TANF-funded program in another state, or a Native TANF-funded program. After 60 months, a family may receive a benefits extension on the basis of hardship if the Department determines the family is unable to become self-supporting because of:

- ❖ Domestic violence
- ❖ Physical or mental inability to perform gainful activity
- ❖ Caring for a child or relative who is experiencing a disability, or
- ❖ Other hardship as defined by the Department in regulation.

Time-limit exemptions may not exceed 25 percent of the Alaska Temporary Assistance caseload. Segregated state TANF funds will be used to provide assistance for families receiving time-limit exemptions beyond the 20 percent maximum allowed under federal law.

3.6 PROGRAM PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

All Alaska Temporary Assistance applicants and program participants have a legal right to a hearing (7 AAC 49.010 - 900). An opportunity for a hearing is granted to any client whose application for assistance is denied or whose benefits are altered or terminated. A hearing request can be made orally or in writing either by the client or by a responsible person acting on the client's behalf to any Division of Public Assistance employee. A hearing request must be made within 30 days after the client has received written notice of the action they wish to aggrieve. The state regulation further defines the written notice requirements, selection of hearing location, and timelines for these actions. The Division of Public Assistance will assist the client, if they wish, to find someone to represent them at the hearing and, if needed, will provide assistance in preparing their claim. A client may file an appeal to the Director of Public Assistance regarding the decision of the hearing authority. The director's decision constitutes final administrative action.

4. ALASKA TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE REQUIREMENTS

Eligible families may participate in the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program provided they fulfill specific obligations. These obligations include providing necessary information about themselves and their family through the program application process, planning for self-sufficiency, and participating in work activities. If they fulfill program requirements, they receive benefits to provide for their basic needs and to assist them in achieving self-sufficiency and exiting the program.

4.1 APPLICATION

Program applicants must complete an application form in writing. To be considered complete, the application must provide all requested information and be supported by documentation the Department determines necessary to establish eligibility. The Department will process applications within thirty days of receipt.

4.2 FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PLAN AND ASSESSMENT

Every adult included in a needy family must complete a Family Self-Sufficiency Plan. The plan outlines the steps the family will take to increase their independence, identifies specific milestones to indicate progress, and indicates the services the Department will provide to assist the family toward their goals. The family works with the Department to develop their own Family Self-Sufficiency Plan.

As the first step in developing the Family Self-Sufficiency Plan, the Department will complete an assessment of the skills, work experience, and employability of each parent or caretaker who is age 18 or older, or who is not attending secondary school and is without a high school diploma or GED. The Department completes this assessment within 90 days after a family's benefits start.

4.3 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Participants must report to the Department specific changes in their household circumstances that might affect their program eligibility or benefits. These reports must be made within a ten-day period after the participant knows of the change. One exception is that if a child is expected to be absent from the home for more than a full calendar month, a report must be made within five days.

If failure to report results in an overpayment, participants are responsible for repayment to the State. An intentional failure to report a change or a misrepresentation of household circumstances may result in fraud prosecution or an intentional program violation penalty.

Participants must also take part in periodic reviews of their family's situation. The Department redetermines eligibility and payment amount based on the information provided during the reviews and any other changes that are reported between reviews. Benefits are calculated prospectively to better coordinate the benefits with the household's current circumstances, which allows the family to budget more effectively, and helps in their efforts toward self-sufficiency.

4.4 CHILD SUPPORT

Regular child support payments are essential to help most single-parent Alaska Temporary Assistance families attain and sustain self-sufficiency. Participants are required to cooperate with the Child Support Services Division (CSSD) in establishing paternity and establishing, modifying, or enforcing a child support order for a dependent child within the family. This requirement is waived if an applicant or recipient can establish good cause for not cooperating with Child Support Services. Good cause reasons must be approved by the Department of Health and Social Services. An applicant must assign to the State all rights to child support for months they receive Alaska Temporary Assistance benefits once the family is eligible for benefits.

4.5 MINOR PARENTS

Minor parents are individuals under the age of 18 who are not married or emancipated, and who have applied for Alaska Temporary Assistance on behalf of themselves and their dependent children. The program requires minor teen parents to follow specific requirements designed to help them be responsible parents and independent adults.

Minor parents must live in an adult-supervised setting. They may live with a parent or guardian, another adult relative, or in a setting such as a group home that has been approved by the Department. If a minor parent does not comply with this requirement, the entire family is ineligible.

Minor parents who do not have a high school diploma or GED must maintain an adequate level of school attendance in a secondary school or other appropriate training program. An adequate level of school attendance is one that meets the program's graduation or certification requirements. If a minor parent does not comply with this requirement, the family's benefit is reduced.

4.6 PENALTIES AND SANCTIONS

An otherwise needy family may not participate in the Alaska Temporary Assistance program if it is specifically excluded by law. A participating family may have benefits reduced for failure to fulfill program requirements.

Families are ineligible for TANF funded Alaska Temporary Assistance benefits when:

- ❖ The family includes an adult who fraudulently misrepresented their residence in order to receive TANF-funded benefits in more than one state. The family is ineligible for 10 years beginning at the date of conviction.
- ❖ The family includes an individual who is determined to be fleeing to avoid prosecution, custody, or confinement after conviction for a crime that is classified as a felony or a class A misdemeanor.
- ❖ A caretaker refuses or voluntarily separates from suitable employment without good cause. The family is ineligible for Alaska Temporary Assistance benefits for one month for the first offense, six months for the second offense and 12 months for any subsequent offenses.
- ❖ The family caretaker is an unmarried minor parent not living with a parent or in another approved, adult-supervised setting.
- ❖ The family includes an adult who intentionally transfers a resource to become eligible. The family may lose eligibility for up to 12 months, depending on the value of the transferred resource.

The Department applies sanctions and penalties regarding Alaska Temporary Assistance benefits to an adult member of the family when:

- ❖ The family includes an adult who committed a crime on or after August 22, 1996 which results in a state or federal felony conviction for possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance. The adult is ineligible for TANF-funded benefits.
- ❖ An adult member of the family incurs an administrative fraud penalty. These penalties result in a six-month disqualification of the offender for the first offense, 12 months for the second, and permanent disqualification for any subsequent violation.
- ❖ The family caretaker is an unmarried minor parent not attending high school or other equivalent training program. The penalty removes the minor parent from the benefit calculation which reduces the family's benefit until they comply with educational attendance requirements.

- ❖ An adult member of the family refuses without good cause to comply with the Family Self-Sufficiency Plan, work activity or child support enforcement cooperation requirements. The maximum payment amount for that family's size is reduced by 40% for the first four months. After a home visit is attempted and a determination is made that the health, safety and well-being of the children in the family will not be significantly jeopardized by further reduction, the penalty amount may increase to 75% for the next four months. Thereafter the penalty may result in a full family sanction and the family will be ineligible for assistance. The penalty ends whenever the family demonstrates good cause or comes into compliance with requirements.

III. WORK AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Alaska has implemented work and self-sufficiency programs that promote job creation, provide the client with job preparation and provide job support services designed to help clients gain and retain paid employment. Alaska regularly evaluates the effectiveness of these programs through data based performance measures of program results.

Alaska conforms to the work participation rates required by TANF rules. Child-only cases are not considered in participation rate calculation. Since federal fiscal year 2002, the participation rate for all families is 50%, and 90% for two-parent families.

5. WORK SERVICES DELIVERY

The Department uses a employment focused approach to providing services to connect Alaska Temporary Assistance families to work and the goal of self-sufficiency.

5.1 WORK FIRST

The Temporary Assistance program uses the Work First approach to meet program goals of self-sufficiency for most families. Recipients immediately engage in a job or work activity. The Work First philosophy holds that the best way to succeed in the job market is to join it and develop work habits and skills on the job. Work First begins with applicant job search. It provides for a supported job search that includes an assessment and screening designed to connect people with the right job. For those unable to find a job, Work First provides additional activities geared toward overcoming barriers to employment.

Because of Alaska's geographic size and economic diversity, the Department modified the Work First model to provide for community and business work experience as an acceptable primary work activity for individuals who need to improve their skills and employability.

The Work First approach is centered on the Family Self-Sufficiency Plan and employability assessment. All families with a needy adult must participate in self-sufficiency planning, except for families who receive a diversion payment. The Plan sets out the steps necessary for the family to follow to achieve independence and identifies milestones and goals along the way.

To implement the Work First approach, the Department developed strong partnerships and contracted with local governments, Native organizations, non-profit and profit-making organizations. These community-based organizations and business are in the best position to deliver training, job preparation, job readiness, and education services as well as to develop job opportunities tailored to each region's economic characteristics. Local partnerships are especially important for effective community and business work experience activities that must be locally defined and monitored,

5.1 FAMILIES FIRST

The Department has recognized that some adults are not successful at going to work and increasing their self-sufficiency through Work First. To help these families the Department has adopted the "Families First" approach. Families First is a holistic approach to supporting the whole family to help those with life complexities be successful in employment and increasing their self-sufficiency.

Families First is a service delivery mechanism for increased collaborative services and customized employment strategies for Alaska Temporary Assistance families who have involvement with multiple Department agencies and/or multiple life complexities.

Alaska Temporary Assistance families with a variety of circumstances and challenges may engage in Families First services. Families engaged in Families First may include those who:

- ❖ Have co-enrollment with multiple Department and/or community agencies, including Children's Services, Juvenile Justice and Behavioral Health.
- ❖ Have made multiple attempts to find employment through Work First and traditional work search activities without success in getting a job;
- ❖ Have been unable to maintain or advance in employment;
- ❖ Have multiple household members of work eligible age;
- ❖ Have experienced long term medical issues that have limited their participation in work and self-sufficiency activities;

- ❖ Have disabled family members who rely on an adult in the home for their daily care; and,
- ❖ Are attempting to rejoin the workforce after a prolonged medical or mental health challenge.

Family members and the agency representatives serving them work together to establish priorities and make collaborative decisions regarding the direction of services and planning for work and self-sufficiency. Providers are made aware of the requirements of the other agencies and the family's self-sufficiency goals to develop a shared plan for self-sufficiency.

Families First uses a customized job development and employment model which matches the needs of a specific employer with the skills and contributions the participant can bring to that employer's business. Families First promotes family integrity and health while maintaining a focus on employment as the way families can increase self-sufficiency.

6. WORK ACTIVITIES

The Alaska Temporary Assistance program requires parents or caretaker relatives to participate in work activities within two years when they are assigned through establishment of the Family Self-Sufficiency Plan.

Work activities include:

- ❖ Unsubsidized employment, including self-employment
- ❖ Subsidized public or private sector employment
- ❖ Work search
- ❖ Vocational Counseling
- ❖ On-the-job-training and subsidized employment
- ❖ Job readiness activities
- ❖ Vocational education and training
- ❖ Approved community work experience

- ❖ Approved business work experience
- ❖ Job skills training directly related to employment
- ❖ Education directly related to employment

7. WORK ACTIVITY EXEMPTIONS

A parent or caretaker may be exempt from the requirement to participate in work activities because they are:

- ❖ Needed in the home to care for a disabled person
- ❖ Determined to have a medical condition that limits their ability to participate in work activities
- ❖ A caretaker of a child age 12 months or younger, however this exemption has a cumulative 12-month lifetime limit
- ❖ A victim of domestic violence
- ❖ Unable to find child care needed for a child under age six

Individuals who are exempt from work activities may be referred to other programs or agencies for special services such as vocational rehabilitation, counseling, substance abuse treatment, or other medical services.

Alaska is not implementing the federal option that requires an exempt parent or caretaker to participate in community work experience activities after two months of benefit receipt. The state chose to opt out of this provision because mandatory participation after two months of assistance may interfere with time spent in activities that will assist the participant to gain early paid employment. Alaska needs flexibility in assigning program participants to work activities to ensure activities are appropriate to the work season, labor market, and available opportunities, especially in remote areas of Alaska.

7.1 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Alaska has implemented special provisions for victims of family violence in coordination with the State Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Further guidance regarding the application of this exemption is in the Alaska Temporary Assistance Manual. Alaska will:

- ❖ Screen individuals applying for and receiving Alaska Temporary Assistance for past or current domestic violence victimization
- ❖ Refer domestic violence victims to specialized, community-based services including counseling and shelters
- ❖ Prepare individual service strategies consistent with safety needs
- ❖ Waive program requirements including work participation and child support cooperation
- ❖ Waive program ineligibility due to exceeding benefit time limits when compliance with these requirements would risk the physical, mental or emotional well-being of the victim
- ❖ Reassess the program waiver, at a minimum, every six months.

7.2 CHILD CARE

A parent or caretaker relative of a child under age six is exempt from the requirement to participate in work activities if he or she demonstrates an inability to find needed child care because:

- ❖ Appropriate child care within a reasonable distance from the home or activity site is unavailable;
- ❖ Affordable child care is unavailable; or
- ❖ Suitable informal child care is unavailable.

Child care is appropriate when a provider who is willing to care for the participant's child:

- ❖ Appears to have the ability to care for children of the same age and development level as the participant's children; and
- ❖ Is or is willing to become an approved or licensed provider.

Child care is within a reasonable distance when the provider's location is within 30 minutes travel time by public or private transportation from the participant's home or activity site.

Child care is affordable when the family has access to a child care program to help pay the cost.

Informal child care is care provided by a relative or friend. Informal care is suitable if it is appropriate, and within a reasonable distance.

8. SERVICES PROVIDED

Services provided to Alaska Temporary Assistance participants may include:

- ❖ On-the-job training and subsidized employment
- ❖ Short-term job training
- ❖ Counseling and skill building
- ❖ Help with child care expenses
- ❖ Referrals for paid employment
- ❖ Referrals for community and business work experience
- ❖ Structured job search with Job Clubs and workshops
- ❖ Transitional services including child care assistance, Medicaid and post-employment support.
- ❖ Customized employment

9 PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

The Department uses a variety of methods to assess and evaluate how well we meet our goal of moving Alaskans into jobs so they can support their families.

9.1 ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

The Department uses specific data based performance measures to determine program effectiveness. These measures include an on-going assessment of program success using the federally mandated work participation rates. Other measures include:

- ❖ Percent of adults with earnings

- ❖ Percent of adults employed within 60 days
- ❖ Percent of cases that close with earnings
- ❖ Percent of cases that close and do not reopen

Temporary Assistance program data is gathered by the Eligibility Information System used by the Department. Ongoing system enhancements are made to evaluate the effectiveness of program policies and to monitor the attainment of regional goals.

9.2 PROGRAM EVALUATION

During 1999 and 2000, the Department collaborated with the University of Alaska Anchorage to conduct a welfare “leavers study,” *Reaching for Independence: A Study of Families That Have Left the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program*. The main objective of this project was to determine the characteristics and status of families that left the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program as well as those who left and later returned.

Additionally, the study helped to clarify the nature of barriers experienced by recipients in finding or keeping employment. Results of this study have been used to assess the effectiveness of the Department’s efforts to move welfare recipients into jobs and have informed efforts to improve service delivery.

9.3 LONG-TERM RECIPIENT STUDY

The Department collaborated again with the University of Alaska Anchorage in 2001-2002 to conduct a study of long-term recipients of Temporary Assistance, *Facing The Final Countdown: A Study of Long-Term Alaska Temporary Assistance Program Recipients*. The purpose of this study was to discover the factors associated with long-term reliance on Temporary Assistance and the degree to which those factors were addressed by the program. The Department has used the results to continue to develop effective policy and service responses.

10. CURRENT WORKERS DISPLACEMENT PROTECTION

Currently employed workers are protected from displacement by state labor laws and Department policies. Workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement use agreement procedures to address complaints about Alaska Temporary Assistance participants and job displacement. Otherwise, the Department conducts a hearing to determine the validity of the complaint. If valid, the Temporary Assistance participant’s placement is terminated.

11. INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT WELFARE TO WORK

11.1 ALASKA WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) is focused on developing a workforce system that is useful, accessible, and understandable to businesses looking for qualified workers, unemployed Alaskans looking for jobs, and incumbent workers wanting to upgrade their skills in a changing work environment. The board provides policy oversight of state and federally funded job training and vocational education programs. Board members, a majority of whom are business and industry leaders, look at employment trends and emerging occupations to ensure training is customized and Alaskans are prepared for high demand, good wage jobs. The AWIB helps meet the workforce development needs of economically disadvantaged citizens and Alaskans with disabilities by ensuring access to quality job training and employment services statewide.

11.2 ALASKA JOB CENTER NETWORK

Alaska has developed one-stop job centers in various communities. One-stop job centers provide job seekers, including Temporary Assistance recipients, with professional and convenient resources to help them find work. Job centers combine under one roof various state and community services geared to assist all job seekers with workforce development and social services. Key agencies include the Divisions of Public Assistance, Employment Security and Vocational Rehabilitation, other Workforce Investment Act agencies and local non-profit organizations.

12. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAM

Diverse economic conditions within Alaska dictate that programs are locally administered to the greatest extent possible. State government recognizes that local knowledge and resources must be used to place clients into jobs or other meaningful work activities. The State collaborates and contracts with community agencies for delivery of some services and purchases others through service agreements. Partnerships between the Division of Public Assistance field staff and community agencies are forged at the local level. Strong partnerships with Native organizations are an essential means of service delivery throughout Alaska.

IV. ALASKA TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

Financial eligibility for Alaska Temporary Assistance is based primarily on family resources and income. Other family economic considerations include childcare, shelter costs, and the number of dependent children living in the home. Temporary Assistance payments are intended to help with basic living expenses and are calculated on a monthly basis. Eligibility is reviewed periodically and redeterminations are made whenever a change in family circumstances is reported.

13. FAMILY NEED

The Department determines which individuals in the household are members of the Alaska Temporary Assistance economic unit. The Department establishes:

- ❖ With whom the dependent child lives
- ❖ Who, of the individuals living with the dependent child, is responsible for the child and if their income and resources are available to the child
- ❖ If the child is financially needy
- ❖ If any of the individuals in the household are legally or financially responsible for the dependent child's caretaker relative.

Financial need is determined to exist if the family resources and income are below the need standards set by the Department in regulation. There are four sets of need standards used to determine if a family is eligible to receive Alaska Temporary Assistance based on the composition of the family unit. The tables used to apply these standards are attached to this plan as an appendix. These standards are adjusted each year by a percentage increase equal to the cost of living percentage increase in Social Security Insurance benefits.

13.1. RESOURCES

Alaska Temporary Assistance rules allow families to keep up to \$2,000 in assets, or \$3,000 if the assistance unit includes an individual who is 60 years of age or older. Program rules will exclude the value of a vehicle that is necessary for family transportation, to participate in work or an approved work activity, as a family's home, or to transport a disabled family member. The equity value of any non-exempt vehicles will be counted as part of the resource limit.

13.2 EARNED INCOME

As an incentive to employment, Alaska Temporary Assistance allows an earned income deduction when determining a participant's payment. The earned income deductions are designed to encourage work and to ease the transition from assistance to paid employment. Temporary Assistance earned income deductions are:

- ❖ First 12 months of earnings: \$150 and 33% of the earned income
- ❖ Second 12 months: \$150 and 25% of the earned income
- ❖ Third 12 months: \$150 and 20% of the earned income
- ❖ Fourth 12 months: \$150 and 15% of the earned income
- ❖ Fifth 12 months: \$150 and 10% of the earned income
- ❖ Beyond 60 months: \$150 of the earned income

13.3 PAYMENTS

The maximum levels of Alaska Temporary Assistance payments for basic living expenses are set in law:

- ❖ \$514 a month for a family consisting of a pregnant woman in her third trimester of pregnancy and no other dependent children
- ❖ \$452 a month for a dependent child living with a non-needy caretaker relative, plus \$102 for each additional child
- ❖ \$821 for a dependent child living with one needy parent or caretaker relative, plus \$102 for each additional child
- ❖ \$821 per month, for a dependent child living with two parents both of whom are able to perform gainful activity, plus \$102 for each additional child. During the months of July, August and September, this amount is reduced by 50 percent.
- ❖ \$923 per month for a dependent child living with two parents, one of whom is physically or mentally unable to perform gainful activity, plus \$102 for each additional child.

Alaska's maximum Temporary Assistance payment for a typical family of three is 48.4% of the Federal Poverty Level for Alaska.

13.4 DIVERSION

Alaska Temporary Assistance offers a diversion program as an alternative to long-term public assistance dependency for families with a job-ready worker. Families that qualify for the diversion program may choose a one-time payment in lieu of ongoing assistance and services. Diversion payments will provide short-term financial assistance to meet critical needs in order to secure or retain employment. The payment amount is based on actual, immediate needs and may not exceed three months' worth of Temporary Assistance cash assistance benefits. A diversion payment will count as income if the family reapplies for Temporary Assistance within 3 months. A family may receive a diversion grant once in a twelve-month period and is limited to a lifetime maximum of four diversion payments.

14. CHILD CARE

Alaska developed a child care program entitled Parents Achieving Self-sufficiency (PASS) to ensure seamless child care services for families as they work to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Child care costs associated with work, approved education and training, community service or other paid and non-paid work activities are paid for through the PASS program.

PASS is a three-tiered program that provides seamless child care subsidies as recipients move from Temporary Assistance toward self-sufficiency. To participate in any PASS program, a parent must be working, attending school or participating in activities assigned on their Family Self-Sufficiency Plan. PASS I is funded through TANF and is available for Temporary Assistance families engaged in work, job readiness or activities necessary to achieve self-sufficiency. PASS II and III are funded by TANF and the Child Care Development Fund. PASS II is available for up to twelve months to employed Temporary Assistance families whose case closes. The PASS III program provides subsidized child care for low-income families. Further information about PASS III can be found in Section VII *OTHER TANF FUNDED SERVICES*. PASS II and III provide subsidies based on a sliding fee scale depending on a family's gross income and family size.

Provider recruitment and referrals for child care are accomplished primarily through resource and referral agencies. Alaska requires that all child care providers who care for children in the provider's home and who participate in the PASS program must be state licensed, state approved, or certified by the military. Tribally Approved or Certified providers with standards that meet or exceed the State of Alaska's standards are also eligible to participate in the PASS program.

15. SUPPORT SERVICES BENEFITS

The Department purchases services necessary to support work activities and to promote self-sufficiency for Alaska Temporary Assistance participants and recipients transitioning into the workforce. These services include, but are not limited to:

- ❖ Transportation
- ❖ Job related training
- ❖ Tools and equipment
- ❖ Employment related clothing
- ❖ Minor auto repair/car insurance
- ❖ Pre-employment interview expenses
- ❖ Start-up Expenses

16. SHELTER

A portion of the Alaska Temporary Assistance benefit is intended to cover shelter costs. Families with shelter costs below the shelter allowance will receive a smaller benefit payment than a family with shelter costs equal to or higher than the shelter allowance. Benefits for families with low or no shelter costs will be reduced by up to 30 percent.

17. BENEFIT DELIVERY

Alaska Temporary Assistance benefits will be paid in the form of cash warrants, wage subsidies, vouchers, and/or third party vendor payments. The Department has implemented electronic benefit transfer (EBT) as a form of issuing Temporary Assistance and Food Stamp benefits for recipients. The EBT system allows recipients to access their pre-authorized benefits by the use of a debit card at cash machines and point-of-sale devices in grocery stores.

18. PRIVACY

The Department of Health and Social Services has adopted and will enforce regulations governing the custody, use, and preservation of Departmental records including the names and addresses of recipients of any public assistance program. Except for purposes directly connected with the administration of public assistance programs, or in connection with a Legislator's official business, no one may disclose, receive or use names, or any information about people who participate in public assistance programs directly or indirectly. Confidentiality rules allow release of a recipient's address to a law enforcement officer who requests the information and identifies the recipient as a fugitive felon or parole violator.

V. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Alaska's TANF programs promote parental responsibility. The Alaska Temporary Assistance Program incorporates child support, minor parent program requirements, and program non-compliance penalties as previously described. Other efforts to promote parental responsibility are described under Other TANF Funded Services. In addition, as a companion to the Alaska Temporary Assistance program, Alaska enacted in 1996 and reauthorized in 2001 child support provisions intended to strengthen families and promote parental responsibilities. These provisions include:

- ❖ Parents of unmarried minor parents may be ordered by a court to pay child support for their grandchild until the minor parent becomes an adult
- ❖ The interest rate on child support arrearages is reduced from 12% to 6 % to encourage delinquent obligors to comply
- ❖ Occupational and drivers licenses of obligors who are three or more months in arrears on their child support payments are withheld unless the obligors make arrangements with the CSSD
- ❖ Alaska's participation in the National Registry of Child Support Cases and a National Directory of new hires to support the interstate enforcement of child support.

VI. NATIVE FAMILY ASSISTANCE

Native American Tribes may administer family assistance programs under their own TANF block grants. Federal law specifically names the twelve regional Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act non-profit organizations and the Metlakatla Indian Community as eligible federal block grant recipients in Alaska. These organizations can receive block grants under the Tribal Family Assistance Program upon approval of a plan submitted to the Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services.

There are currently seven Alaska Native organizations operating TANF-funded Native Family Assistance programs in Alaska – Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) in interior Alaska, Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA) in the Bristol Bay region, Cook Inlet Tribal Corporation, Inc. (CITCI) in the Municipality of Anchorage, the Association of Village Council Presidents in western Alaska, the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHIA) in southeast Alaska, Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA) in the Kodiak area, and Maniilaq Inc. in the Northwest Arctic region.

Legislation passed in Alaska in 2000 and reauthorized in 2005 gave the state of Alaska the authority to award grants to certain Alaska Native organizations who develop and operate their own TANF programs. Native organizations use the state grant to augment their federal TANF block grant to deliver services and activities that promote self-sufficiency and enhance the lives of families in their services areas.

The Native regional non-profit organizations are community-based with close ties to local economies. These organizations are able to deliver locally based and culturally relevant programs. The State also contracts and grants with Native organizations to provide for the delivery of Native Employment Work (NEW) Services in those areas not served by Native Family Assistance Programs.

The Department provides federal and state TANF funds to certain Alaska Native TANF programs that have a plan approved by the federal Department of Health and Human Services. For purposes of claiming state funds granted to Native TANF grantees as maintenance of effort (MOE), Alaska will adopt the eligibility requirements of any such Native TANF programs as its own.

VII. OTHER TANF FUNDED SERVICES

The department uses segregated federal TANF funds for other programs for needy families. These programs provide services that promote one or more of the four purposes of TANF block grants. These programs are designed to: provide assistance to allow children to be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives, promote job preparation and work, prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and encourage the formation and maintenance of two parent families.

PASS III CHILD CARE

PASS III is the third tier in the Parents Achieving Self-Sufficiency (PASS) program which provides seamless child care services for families as they work to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Child care costs associated with work, approved education and training, community service or other paid and non-paid work activities are paid for through the PASS program.

PASS I is available for Temporary Assistance families engaged in work, job readiness or activities necessary to achieve self-sufficiency. PASS II is available for up to twelve months to employed Temporary Assistance families whose case closes. Families who are found eligible for the Temporary Assistance program may receive child care services under PASS I and II .

The PASS III program provides subsidized child care for low to moderate income families. Segregated federal TANF funds may be used for child care assistance for PASS III families who are employed or otherwise participating in an eligible activity and whose income is no more than 75% of the state's 2008 median income. PASS II and III provide subsidies based on a sliding fee scale depending on a family's gross income and family size.

Provider recruitment and referrals for child care are accomplished primarily through resource and referral agencies. Alaska requires that all child care providers who care for children in the provider's home and who participate in the PASS program must be state licensed, state approved, or certified by the military.

20. TRANSPORTATION

The Department supports the promotion and development of transportation alternatives for Alaska Temporary Assistance participants who are making the transition to work and self-sufficiency. This support is provided through our participation in collaborative planning, and by using segregated federal TANF funds to support a public transportation systems capacity to serve Alaska Temporary Assistance participants in communities where lack of transportation options impacts participants' ability to obtain and maintain employment. Most of the funds are used to match federal grants received by community organizations providing transit and paratransit services. Some funds are used to to arrange transportation for individual Temporary Assistance recipients. The Department is working collaboratively with the Alaska Department of Transportation and the Alaska Department of Labor in these efforts. In addition, the Alaska Temporary Assistance program encourages local transportation initiatives developed by communities and directed toward addressing their unique transportation problems.

21. PREGNANCY PREVENTION

The Department, with the Division of Public Health acting as the lead agency, invests segregated federal TANF funds in an array of services focused on reducing out-of-wedlock and teen pregnancies. The goal is to reduce the number of these pregnancies as a means to improve the family's opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency. To achieve this goal, the Department has focused on unwed and unintended births and has set an immediate goal of reducing the incidence of these births 10%, from 37.5% statewide to 27.5% statewide.

The Department collaborates with community partners to provide education, especially to teens, on the problems and risks associated with out-of-wedlock and teen parent births. In areas of the state with high teen and out-of-wedlock births and high numbers of unintended pregnancies, efforts are focused on increasing access to family planning services and contraceptives for at-risk teens and women

In conjunction with pregnancy prevention efforts, the Department is provides education to the public on statutory rape and basic training to community partners on identifying and reporting incidences of statutory rape.

Alaska, using non-TANF funding, supports programs designed to reach Alaska services systems, families and individuals statewide to promote healthy relationships, children and families. The Department of Health and Social Services, the Office of the Governor and other state agencies target both women and men, children and adults, and workers dedicated to supporting the health, safety and education of Alaskans. The wide range of activities encompassed work to support reduction of teen and out-of-wedlock pregnancy through reducing statutory rape, sexual assault and domestic violence. Efforts promote respect, healthy relationships and safety of all Alaskan's.

A brief description of some current Alaska efforts is attached as an appendix.

22. SERVICES FOR REFUGEE FAMILIES

Refugee families new to Alaska often encounter multiple barriers to employment and self-sufficiency including language, culture, health, transportation and basic navigation of Alaska social and health services. In order to support refugee families receiving Alaska Temporary Assistance benefits, the Division of Public Assistance collaborates with Catholic Social Services, the only Office of Refugee Assistance funded program in Alaska.

Refugee families new to Alaska who receive Alaska Temporary Assistance are referred to Catholic Social Services for work preparation and placement, English language classes and life skills education tailored to their needs. The Division provides a grant to Catholic Social Services which allows this agency to operate as the Work Services case management provider for these families, integrating family self-sufficiency planning and work placement into the other services these families access. This unique and successful partnership allows a single agency with specialized services to meet the needs of this population for the first 12 months they are in Alaska, This reduces the number of agencies and programs families must access to receive the support they need to successfully plan for and achieve self-sufficiency through employment, and ensures that work services which are relevant and effective are provided to this special population.

VIII. ADMINISTRATION

1. ALASKA STATUTE

State statute requires the Department to:

- ❖ Provide assistance with basic living expenses and self-sufficiency services to needy children and their families
- ❖ Determine program standards that provide clients with incentives to work, participate in financial planning, and opportunities to develop self-sufficiency
- ❖ Prepare a State Plan to submit to the Federal government to assure that federal money is available to the state for operation of the Temporary Assistance program.
- ❖ Administer the program to assure consistency with federal requirements
- ❖ Report to the federal government and state legislature information required and comply with any provisions the federal government determines necessary to ensure correct and verifiable information on the program
- ❖ Conduct studies and research in order to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the state program
- ❖ Adopt regulations and take actions necessary to implement, interpret, and administer the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program.

2. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION OF TANF

The Department of Health and Social Services administers the Alaska Temporary Assistance Program through the Division of Public Assistance. The organizational structure of the Department and the Division with primary responsibility for the administration of TANF is attached as an appendix.

3. MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT

The Department funds a number of activities in order for Alaska to meet TANF Maintenance of Effort requirements. Categories of expenditures eligible as MOE and claimed by Alaska's Department of Health and Social Services include:

- ❖ Basic assistance – to needy families as determined eligible by the Division of Public Assistance
- ❖ Native Family Assistance Programs – Department grants to Native Organizations administering their own Tribal TANF programs to support basic assistance payments and other expenditures eligible as MOE for Alaska’s Department of Health and Social Services
- ❖ Child Care Development Funds – Parents Achieveing Self Sufficiency (PASS) child care subsidies paid to child care providers and parents as determined eligible for PASS by the Division of Public Assistance or its grantees
- ❖ Administrative – a portion of the costs of the Department’s administration of activties as described in this plan