Simplifying TANF Eligibility

Statewide POVERTY ACTION NETWORK

TANF should be a pathway out of poverty. Families living in deep poverty should get the help they need. It is harmful to cut families off while they're still unable to meet their basic needs.

Eligibility for TANF is overly complicated. Even though less than 1 in 10 families face persistent need after the 60-month limit, those who do are screened through at least 14 exceptions to determine eligibility, all of which require verification and ongoing proof to maintain.

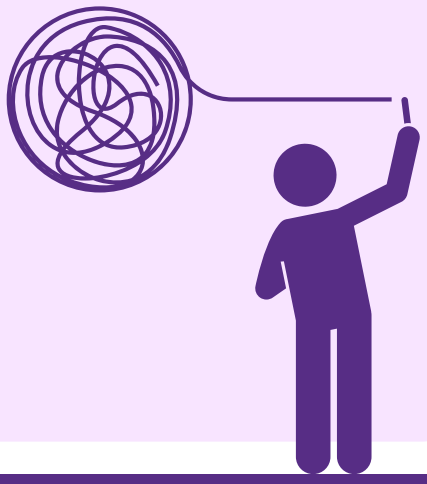
As a result of this complicated process:

- Families who should technically qualify are **cut off** for lack of "proof"
- Agency staff have an **undue administrative burden**
- **Racial inequities**, with Black, indigenous, and multiracial families denied access at higher rates

About 110 families living in deep poverty are cut off from TANF each month due to time limits

Getting help should be simple and fair.

Time limits are the remnant of a recession-era policy designed to save money by cutting people off benefits. This is the last piece of sweeping 2011 benefits cuts that has not yet been reinstated. **Since 2023, our state has cut off 4,619 families, including 9,320 children**, (as of Sept. 2026) despite having demonstrable need and long-term consequences for losing assistance.

By simplifying TANF eligibility Washington gains:

- More **equitable access** to lifeline support
- **Less administrative burden** on agency staff - freeing time and resources
- Potential error rate **cost avoidance** by reducing overly complicated policy
  - If our error rate increases, Washington could have to pay $305M to the Federal Government