MISSISSIPPI STATE PLAN

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES

Authorized by the
Personal Responsibility and
Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193)

Reauthorized by the
Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) (Pub. L. 109-171)

Mississippi Department of Human Services

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I. OVERVIEW

Goals, Results and Public Involvement

Mississippi began the process of Welfare Reform with Legislation passed in 1993, to implement statewide changes and demonstration projects to address the needs of the State's low-income population through increased work opportunities and supportive services for adults and required school attendance and health care for children. All citizens of the State were provided opportunities for input and comments through publication and filing of the Plan for review and through a series of public meetings in locations over the State. The Mississippi Welfare Restructuring Program Act of 1993 was amended in the 1994 Legislative session and, subsequently, waivers were requested and approved by HHS, HCFA and USDA to implement the amended reform measures. Public comment was also solicited during the State Administrative Procedures filing period set by the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, at 25-43-1 through 19, prior to implementation of waivers beginning August through December of 1995.

Development of this state plan for implementation of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program established by U.S. Public Law 104 - 193 has been a two-step process. Mississippi was the first to take advantage of the TANF Block Grant funds available beginning October 1, 1996. The initial State Plan, which consisted of the then-existing State Plan for AFDC-JOBS coupled with the Federally-approved waiver projects previously adopted by the Legislature, was submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to take effect on October 1, 1996. All Federal and State public review and comment requirements having already been met.

At the same time MDHS, in coordination with other State departments and the Legislature, undertook a more comprehensive review and analysis of policy issues to develop an amended State Plan that would both meet Federal TANF requirements and take full advantage of TANF's flexibility in methods of reducing welfare dependency. The amended TANF State Plan, dated March 13, 1997, to fully implement the TANF Work Program was the product of that effort.

The TANF State Plan is designed to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies;
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families; and
- Prevent Program fraud and abuse.

Recognizing that recipient families which include adult heads-of-household, pregnant minor heads-of-household, minor parent heads-of-household or spouses of such heads-of household, unless specifically exempt, have a 60-month limit for assistance, the Agency's focus at the point of application must be the determination of work readiness or the assistance needed to become work ready, instead of the previous emphasis on determining eligibility for cash benefits.

A report compiled from comments received from ten focus group meetings held across the State during October and November 1996, and from numerous other public meetings conducted by State Legislators within their Senate and House Districts, supported the TANF goals of encouraging personal responsibility for self-sufficiency through opportunities leading to work preparedness and employment. Although progress has been made to develop resources and network with other agencies, local government and business communities, these concerns are shared by the Agency and continue to be addressed within the scope of the State Plan.

One of the most important goals of the State is to improve the lives of all Mississippians. Therefore, a series of regional hearings was held during March and April 2000 to listen to the public's concerns and suggestions as to how to improve services to Mississippi's children and families. Concerns expressed in these meetings included child care needs, transportation, teen and out-of-wedlock pregnancy, medical needs, training or employment availability and transitional benefits.

Progress is measured in part by the number of recipients who have left the assistance rolls to accept employment opportunities and by those persons satisfactorily participating in allowable work activities. The State will continue to measure progress statistically for work participation and cost effectiveness to evaluate success. Monitoring will continue through ongoing administrative fiscal accountability and reporting procedures currently in place along with additional reporting requirements related to TANF.

Needy Families

The definition of "needy families" is contained in this document under Section III, Other Provisions. Mississippi will provide services to families, residing in the state, with dependent children (under the age of 18 years), who meet the TANF income and resources criteria and deprivation outlined in the plan. Although eligibility criteria for financial assistance will be the same statewide, the level of services provided from other programs (initiatives) may vary. Other explanations regarding non-citizens, safeguarding family privacy, and rights to objective hearings are also addressed in Section III.

Work and Self-Sufficiency

Recipient work requirements and services related to attaining self-sufficiency are addressed in Section III. Each community is encouraged to become involved in the overall goal of self-sufficiency for all families. Mutual success for the community and needy families is dependent upon community awareness of the service needs and employment opportunities to be offered to meet these needs.

A network of business, education, religious, local government and nonprofit organizations was initially developed as an integral part of the "New Direction" waiver implementation. This network was expanded by the Resource Development Unit in the MDHS Division of Economic Assistance to enhance activities within the TANF Work Program. This unit coordinated the development of transportation resources and work opportunities to provide services through community resources focused on the family's needs and job readiness. Governmental, non-governmental, nonprofit and for-profit entities were engaged in this effort to ensure that Mississippi's program was successful, including the metropolitan midtown project established as a one-stop comprehensive resource center to serve low income families in that geographic area and to provide training and job placements.

Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996

- Progress has been made in moving families from welfare to work;
- More families are entering employment;
- Earnings are up; and
- TANF caseloads are down.

However, in spite of some dramatic results, there are still individuals not working or in entry level jobs with incomes that are too low or too erratic to raise their families above poverty. Under TANF, States have the flexibility and resources to develop programs that reach all families, promote success at work, and convert welfare offices into job centers. The task of welfare reform is far from finished.

The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) is ready to take the critical next steps to ensure that low-income Mississippians receive the essential supports:

- To preserve families by encouraging marriage;
- To find and maintain gainful employment;
- To provide quality child care services; and
- To reduce behaviors and environments that place youths and families at risk.

MDHS has broad discretion to provide a wide range of benefits and services and to set different eligibility standards for different types of benefits.

The State continues to explore and improve awareness of available resources and the potential for additional legislation to serve the needs for this population. Other recipients who have difficulty joining the workforce because of limited skills or experience are assigned to special work-related components and life skills training within the work program.

Employers and other community leaders and churches are encouraged to provide mentoring services within the employment setting and the community.

Benefits

Mississippi will provide financial assistance to families determined eligible based on the current standard of need, resources and maximum payment level for that size family. Maximum grants are $110 per month for the first person, $36 for the second person and $24 for each additional person. TANF monthly benefits in Mississippi are provided by means of the Debit MasterCard® card to the recipient family. Time limits are addressed in Section III of this document in accordance with the Public Law 104 - 193. Work-related sanctions for noncompliance without good cause or exemption status create a full benefit sanction. Sanctions for other noncompliance factors are administered by a 25% grant reduction or termination according to Section 408.

Supportive services provided include case management, child care and transportation assistance for training or employment, payment for work-related expenses to meet needs associated with entry into employment or training, participation stipends and job retention bonus payments and advancement services. Transitional child care and transportation services are addressed later in this plan.

Cultural Change

The culture of the "welfare" office is changing to support work and self-sufficiency by embracing the concept of immediate attachment to work for those deemed work ready and administered in a "one-stop" shop environment. Eligibility determination for benefits, case management with supportive services, and job referrals are housed in one location in as much as possible. All TANF eligibility determination and work program case management and related staff receives policy and systems interface training to coordinate all activities related to work activities, exemptions, sanctions, placement and supportive services. All new and reassigned staff is trained prior to caseload assignment on all issues in the TANF State Plan, policy manual and systems procedures to assure program conformity and understanding of the urgency, considering the 60 and 24-month maximum benefit limits, to help recipients move quickly into work activities. Recipients also receive information and training on the cash assistance and work requirements to facilitate the transition toward self-sufficiency with a strong commitment for success from both recipients and agency staff with the support of the community. Written notices are mailed to all TANF recipients when needed to inform recipients of changes.

Parental Responsibility

Parental responsibility is encouraged by the Personal Responsibility Contract which spells out agency and recipient responsibilities. The Contract also addresses the parent/caretaker's responsibility to maintain regular health care and school attendance for their children. It reinforces their responsibility to cooperate with the Division of Child Support Enforcement. The State Plan addresses services to teen parents. State legislation also addresses teen pregnancy and prevention issues in the educational setting.

Parental responsibility is further emphasized in the Employability Development Plan. The court system and law enforcement agencies are responsible for cases of domestic violence and statutory rape with referrals to appropriate service providers, including this Agency. Family planning services are available and referrals are made upon request.

Tribes

TANF eligibility determination and payments are made through the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the work-related referrals and services are handled through the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and MDHS. The Indian tribe members are provided equitable access to assistance and supportive services under the State Plan and are allowed certain income and resource exclusions as specifically provided by law. Technical assistance and/or training are provided upon their request.

Administration

The organizational structure is addressed in Section III, Other Provisions. The Mississippi Department of Human Services is the single State Agency designated by the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, Title 43, with authority to administer the TANF Program, and to make rules and regulations governing the administration of the TANF Plan. All local political subdivisions (counties) are served with at least one office in each county. The Agency contracts with public and private entities based on procurement statutory requirements and local needs. The elements of the TANF program are in place in accordance with the public filing of the TANF State Plan and subsequent changes/updates, and changes will be implemented based on this plan.

Prevention of Fraud and Abuse

Mississippi maintains a strong program of abuse prevention and prosecution for persons convicted of fraudulent receipt of benefits. Overpayments, whether agency-caused or recipient-caused (either intentionally or inadvertently), are recovered from ongoing or future benefits and through direct collections. The claims recovery process is an automated system to calculate amounts, send demand letters, and track and report collections.

Ongoing Plan Development

The state of Mississippi is submitting its FY2009 TANF State Plan revised October 1, 2008. The Plan was made available to the public for 45 days for review and comment on June 16, 2008. All comments received during this period will be compiled for administrative and legislative review to ensure appropriate consideration and modifications in the new plan. The State Administrative Procedures filing period has also been fulfilled as required in the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, at 25-43-1 through 19, with the filing of the State Plan and policy/procedures document in the Secretary of State's Office for public review and comment. The Plan will be the operational document for the TANF grant and work program with supportive services.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 increased flexibility and authorized grants to states to operate a program designed to:

- Provide temporary assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Through the comprehensive TANF Program, Mississippi is serving the varied needs of the state's low-income population. The focus of this program is to provide financial support to eligible families who are actively engaged in allowable work activities in efforts to overcome the barriers preventing them from achieving total financial independence. Mississippi's Plan emphasizes family self-sufficiency through full-time private sector unsubsidized employment of all able-bodied adults. The program also includes financial assistance to needy families and children who are not subject to work requirements and who meet the TANF exemption criteria, such as hardship, families who have left the TANF rolls and low-income families who need supportive services to maintain and upgrade their employment.

A. Waivers

Since the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 enabled the State to continue its focus on moving recipients from dependency to work and self-sufficiency, policy changes were made on TANF implementation within the scope of State authority without the need for waivers. Under State flexibility permitted in Public Law 104 - 193, Mississippi discontinued the "New Direction" waivers effective July 1997 for operation of Learnfare, Immunization/Checkups, Family Cap, AFDC-UP, Work Encouragement and WorkFirst provisions including additional waivers to enhance the WorkFirst Program (transitional child care, transitional transportation, transitional Medicaid, sanctioning exempt JOBS volunteers, and exclusion of income from incentive payments related to monitoring the waiver components). Many of the original waiver provisions have been continued within the scope of the ongoing TANF State Plan.

B. State Legislation

The Mississippi Welfare Reform Program Restructuring Act of 1993, as amended, passed by the Mississippi Legislature and approved by the Governor, set the mandate for change and authorized the Mississippi Department of Human Services to request waivers needed to

implement programs relating to full-time employment, child care, school attendance, preventive health care, and other issues. In the 1997 session of the Mississippi Legislature, public assistance statutes were amended and approved by the Governor to fully implement all TANF requirements, deleting the statute formerly authorizing demonstration projects. The law includes a full-employment program for recipients assigned to wage-paying jobs designed to increase their self-sufficiency and improve their competitive positions in the workforce. The Mississippi Code 1972, Annotated, Title 43, Chapters 1 and 17 address authority of MDHS to operate programs and pay benefits within TANF guidelines including requirements for:

- School attendance for children six through 17 years;
- Immunizations for children;
- Family benefit cap to prevent assistance increases for additional children (unless there is a twelve consecutive month break in TANF benefits);
- Minor parents to reside with a parent or adult caretaker and to continue their education at least to high school graduation or GED level;
- Work requirements with supportive and transitional services to move recipients into self-sufficiency and independence through employment; and
- Personal responsibility contract is signed by the recipient to acknowledge his/her responsibilities to the State in return for benefits. The law also includes penalties for failure to comply with these responsibilities and provisions whereby benefits can be re-approved following compliance.

C. Work Program

Mississippi's demonstration full employment program (WorkFirst) was implemented in October 1995 based on State law and waivers granted by HHS and USDA. The WorkFirst pilot project was implemented in six counties which comprised approximately 25% of the State's caseload. The WorkFirst Program offered job-ready recipients a helping hand in gaining full employment and in learning and developing new job skills though the subsidized employment component. It also provided an opportunity for businesses to expand without the high cost of employee training as AFDC and Food Stamp-Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits were diverted to wages. Under State law, subsidized job placements were new positions; regular workers could not be displaced.

The waivers originally needed to implement the subsidized work program are no longer necessary under the TANF Work Program. Mississippi continues to operate most of the work program activities in place on October 1, 1996, utilizing unsubsidized work placements as authorized in State law in Title 43 and in Titles I and VIII (Food Stamps/SNAP) of Public Law 104 -193.

III. FAMILY ASSISTANCE PLAN

A. General Provisions

1. Mississippi will conduct a program designed to provide allowable work activities that will serve all political subdivisions (counties) in the State with emphasis on providing assistance to needy families with children and providing parents with job preparation, work, and support services to enable them to leave the program and become self-sufficient to the degree that State and local resources allow.

2. Mississippi will require a work eligible individual (an adult or minor head of household or a non-recipient parent receiving assistance under the Program to engage in an allowable work activity once the State determines the parent or caretaker is work eligible, or once the work eligible individual has received assistance under the program for 24 months (whether or not consecutive), whichever is earlier.

   Mississippi will not issue assistance payments to a family that includes an adult head-of-household, pregnant minor head-of-household, minor parent head-of-household, spouse of such head-of household or a non-recipient parent who has received TANF funding for 60 months (whether consecutive or not), except as allowed by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 in regard to the 20% exemption.

3. Mississippi will ensure that a work eligible individual (an adult or minor head of household or a non-recipient parent) receiving assistance under the Program will engage in work activities in accordance with Section 407 of Title 1 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (reauthorized by DRA of 2005). Work requirements and activities are defined in the revised TANF State Plan and current supporting policy and procedures manuals and bulletins. These documents are open for public review and comment according to the Administrative Procedures Act. The work requirements and activities are tracked through the system (MAVERICS and JAWS) interface throughout the period of assistance to ensure compliance is met, appropriate penalties imposed, and time limits not exceeded.

   Mississippi will comply with the mandatory work requirements and strive to meet the participation rates required. In Fiscal Year 2000, 40% of all families receiving assistance must be in a countable work activity. The percentage increased to 45% in Fiscal Year 2001 and 50% in Fiscal Year 2002 and the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2003. Currently, the rate remains at 50% under the TANF program reauthorization. Participation rate requirements may be adjusted based on reduction in the caseload. Beginning October 1, 2001, State funds were used for cash assistance payments for two-parent families. The State does not claim these expenditures against the Maintenance of Effort requirement. Therefore, federal mandatory work requirements and participation rates do not apply to the State's two-parent families.

4. Mississippi will take reasonable and necessary steps to restrict the use and disclosure of information about individuals and families receiving assistance under the program attributable to funds provided by the federal government. Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, at 43-1-19, restricts disclosure of recipient information pursuant to federal regulations and to laws regarding use of electronically exchanged data. MDHS also provides staff training upon entry and annually thereafter with a Confidential Information Agreement setting forth policy and penalties for safeguarding information in accordance with requirements for the exchange of information received from the Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service.

5. Mississippi established a task force consisting of public and private organizations and individuals to review the incidence and circumstances of out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Based on these findings, goals were established and recommendations made to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies with special emphasis on teenage pregnancies. The State established numerical goals for reducing the illegitimacy ratio of the State (as defined in Section 403(a)(2)(B)) for federal fiscal year 1997 through calendar year 2005. The goals were:

Year	Reduction from 1995 Ratio	Ratio Goal
1998	2.5%	42.9%
1999	3.0%	42.4%
2000	4.9%	40.5%
2001	6.0%	39.4%
2002	7.8%	37.6%
2003	10.3%	35.1%
2004	11.4%	34.0%
2005	12.6%	32.8%

These findings and recommendations were provided to the Governor and the State Legislature first in January 1998 and again in January 1999. These documents have been published and are distributed to interested groups, to other organizations, and to the State Departments of Education and Health. As a result of the task force reports, new legislation was passed into law to raise the age of consent, strengthen the statutory rape laws and to establish abstinence training in the public school. Mississippi has set a goal to reduce the State's teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 2006-2015.

6. MDHS established an Abstinence/Youth Development Program within the Foundation for Families Unit to provide information and coordinate activities to promote abstinence, reduce the teen and out-of-wedlock births, and develop teen leadership throughout the State by working with public and private organizations, schools, churches and interested groups. This unit will continue an aggressive public service campaign including billboards and radio and television announcements. A video targeting teens was developed using actual teenagers and is available for viewing by groups.

The MDHS - Abstinence Unit will continue to work with related organizations and individuals to develop a program designed to reach State and local law enforcement officials, the education system and relevant counseling services that provide education and training on the problem of statutory rape so that teenage pregnancy prevention programs may be expanded in scope to include men.

B. Special Provisions

1. Mississippi will not treat families moving into the State differently than other families under the TANF program. To treat families differently would create an unfair advantage to persons moving into the State with higher benefits.

2. Mississippi will provide assistance to individuals who are not citizens of the United States only in accordance with the provisions outlined in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, State Law and subsequent amendments to the Social Security Act.

   The following qualified aliens are eligible:

   · For five years after obtaining the designated alien status:
   - An alien admitted under Section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA);
   -An alien who is granted asylum under Section 208 of the INA;
   - An alien whose deportation is being withheld under Section 243(h) of the INA, or whose removal is being withheld under Section 241(b)(3) of the INA;
   - An alien who is a Cuban or Haitian entrant as defined in Section 501(e) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980; or
   - An alien admitted as an Amerasian immigrant pursuant to Section 584 of the Foreign Operations Act, as amended.

   · For an unlimited period, the following qualified aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residence:
   - Veterans (honorably discharged for reasons other than alienage); active duty personnel (other than active duty for training), and their spouses and unmarried dependent children; and
   - Aliens who are lawfully admitted for permanent residence and have worked for 40 qualifying quarters of coverage under Title II of the SSA or can be credited with such quarters as provided for by section 435 of PRWORA (SUSC 1645), not including quarters beginning January 1, 1997 in which the alien received any Federal means-tested public benefit.

   Mississippi will provide assistance to victims of severe forms of trafficking to the same extent as aliens.

3. Mississippi has established objective criteria for the delivery of benefits and the determination of eligibility and for fair and equitable treatment, including the opportunity for recipients who have been adversely affected to be heard in a State administrative or appeal process. The State will administer the due process notification of adverse action with an opportunity for a fair hearing handled independently of the county office eligibility and/or benefit level decision to resolve any recipient benefit decreases, terminations, or related issues. Basic assistance program eligibility criteria and benefit levels are the same statewide.

4. Mississippi will not require a parent or caretaker relative, who after receiving TANF benefits for two months and is not exempt from work requirements, to participate in community services employment. However, allowable work activities include community service programs and placement in this work activity will be made based on the Employability Development Plan and available resources in that area leading to employment.

5. If TANF funding is available, Mississippi will assist TANF Work Program participants to train for, seek, and maintain employment—

   (I) providing direct care in a long-term care facility (as such terms are defined under section 1397j of this title); or

   (II) in other occupations related to elder care determined appropriate by the State for which the State identifies an unmet need for service personnel.

   The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), Division of Economic Assistance (DEA) shall partner with the Mississippi Community College Board, Mississippi Department of Employment Security and/or other entities to provide short-term training (e.g., Certified Nurses Assistance (CNA) training for placement in a nursing home, etc.) for TANF Work Program (TWP) participants who seek employment in the eldercare workforce. Training shall be established based on employer needs in a particular area of the State. Training may also be established on an individual basis based on the individual's career goal(s)/objective(s) and training needs in conjunction with employer needs.

C. Other Provisions

1. Mississippi is making available to the public the new TANF State Plan and other State program plans and policy bulletins addressing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 in accordance with Federal and the Mississippi Administrative Procedure Law, Title 25, Chapter 43 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated. The amended State Plan with implementing policy bulletins, draft policy bulletins and copies of policy manuals are on file with the Secretary of State's Office for public inspection and comment. Provisions of the Mississippi Welfare Reform Program Restructuring Act (with waivers) were filed timely prior to implementation in 1995.

The original TANF State Plan effective October 1, 1996 contained the mandates and the Amended State Plan includes the mandates and State options. All documents have been filed for public review and comment. Thus, we have met the public review and comment requirements.

Note: Although the eligibility manuals are not attached with the State Plan for TANF, the Mississippi Department of Human Services continues to administer the statewide family financial assistance and work programs through specific instructions for eligibility determination, services and sanctions with policy and procedures manuals and supplements (bulletins) filed for public review.

2. The TANF Program is administered by the Mississippi Department of Human Services, the single State agency designated by State law for eligibility determination and spending authority. The organization is State administered with at least one full service office for intake and client service delivery located in each county with structured supervisory and regional administrative levels.

3. Mississippi will continue to provide financial assistance to needy families determined eligible under the currently established policies in the TANF State Plan and the Standard of Need and maximum payment level for that size family as prescribed in the Program Policy Manual (Volume III) and supporting policy bulletins, and the Systems Procedural Manual (Volume X). "Needy families" are identified according to ongoing income, resources, and deprivation criteria contained in these manuals. The money payment level set by State law at 43-17-5(1), is $110 for the first person, $36 for the second person and $24 for additional persons, except as restricted by the Family Benefit Cap.

4. In Mississippi, TANF monthly benefits and supportive service payments provided to individuals participating in allowable work activities or transitional programs are provided to the family by means of a Mississippi Debit MasterCard® card account. TANF supportive service payments issued to providers are paid by check or by vouchers redeemable for services.

5. Deny TANF Assistance

   a. According to the TANF prohibitions/requirements in Title I, Section 408, Mississippi will, except for individuals and families specifically exempt or excluded for good cause, deny TANF assistance to:

      - Families without a minor child residing with the parent or adult caretaker relative;
      - Families including an adult head-of-household or spouse of the head-of-household, pregnant minor head-of-household or spouse of such head-of-household, a minor parent head-of-household or spouse of such minor parent head-of-household who has received assistance under TANF for 60 months (whether or not consecutive);
      - Families not assigning certain support rights to the State;

- Families who fail to cooperate in establishing paternity or obtaining child support;
- Teenage parents without a high-school education or equivalent, who are not employed and do not attend school or an equivalent training program;
- Minor parents not living in an adult-supervised setting;
- Minor children who are absent from the home for a significant period (30 days or more). NOTE: A relative who fails to report the absence of a child within five days will be disqualified;
- Families who fail to complete up-front job search or vocational rehabilitation requirements, whichever is required;
- Families who fail to comply with the Employability Development Plan signed by the individual, to cooperate with the TANF Work Program, or to participate satisfactorily in the assigned work activity;
- Fleeing felons and parole violators; and
- Ineligible aliens.

b. In accordance with 21 USC 862a, Mississippi shall deny TANF assistance to a convicted felon.

6. Mississippi will coordinate services, where available, with public and private entities (i.e., Mississippi Departments of Rehabilitation Services, Employment Security and Mental Health, and the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, etc.) to allow TANF families with barriers (i.e., little or no work experience, domestic violence, limited English proficiency, learning disabilities, mental, physical disabilities and/or substance abuse) an opportunity to gain access to services and resources needed to obtain the highest level of self-sufficiency within the constraints of the TANF time-limits. Special screening and referral procedures will be used to identify and refer the individual for the appropriate service. Mississippi will deny benefits to individuals who fail to comply with the activities provided by these entities.

7. Hardships will be assessed starting at forty (40) months and continued eligibility determined at the end of the individual's five (5) year time limit. The following individuals, as approved, may continue to receive benefits beyond the five-year time limit so long as the State does not exceed the 20% exemption criteria:

- Adults who are determined to be temporarily or permanently incapacitated and the household income does not exceed the TANF Basic 100% Requirement.

- Parents who are required to provide full-time care for an ill or incapacitated child or adult in the home and the household income does not exceed the TANF Basic 100% Requirement.

8. Mississippi will not deny assistance to a minor parent with a child under the age of 12 weeks for failure to attend school, but will permit the minor parent to voluntarily participate in educational activities as medically appropriate.

9. Mississippi requires regular school attendance and regular immunizations for all dependent children served under TANF. This is in accordance with State Law at 43-17-5. A 25% monthly benefit reduction is imposed for failure to comply without good cause.

10. Mississippi will impose a family benefit cap to prevent increases in assistance for new children coming into the family after the initial ten months of benefits, with certain exceptions (State Law 43-17-5).

11. Mississippi will also deny assistance for ten years to an individual convicted in Federal or State court of having made a fraudulent statement or representation, with respect to the individual's place of residence in order to receive TANF assistance simultaneously from two or more states.

12. Mississippi will deny benefits to all adult TANF applicants who do not meet an exemption from work requirements, who fail to comply with job search or vocational rehabilitation activities during the 30-day TANF application processing period.

13. Recipients of SSI are excluded from the TANF assistance unit.

14. Mississippi will operate a statewide work program mandated by State law and TANF to provide work activities and supportive services (child care, work stipend, participation stipends, work related expense payments and job retention bonus payments) focused on enabling families to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency.

    State law and Public Law 104-193 provide for a full benefit sanction of TANF and comparable SNAP sanctions until compliance for families in which the nonexempt individual refuses, without good cause, to participate. The work program emphasizes unsubsidized jobs with supportive services following employment and/or transitional services following termination of the TANF grant because of increased earnings or loss of earned income disregards. The family also receives supportive services during the training and transitional services when benefits are terminated after employment.

15. Case management is the process for coordinating work activities and supportive services for TANF Work Program participants. This involves monitoring the participant's attendance and progress and amending the Employability Development Plan, component assignment, and supportive services, as necessary, to keep the participant on a path to achieving self-sufficiency. When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. Case management is performed by MDHS staff.

16. TANF mandates participation in approved work activities for all adult recipients who do not meet specific exemption criteria. All adults who are not specifically exempt will be referred for work activities. When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. An adult included in the TANF grant assistance unit may be exempt from the mandatory work requirements for one of the following reasons:

- Incapacitated and not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services
- Temporary illness or injury
- Pregnancy in third trimester
- Caretaker of a child under 12 months old (up to 12 months)
- Caretaker of an ill or incapacitated person
- Age (over 60 and under 18)
- Domestic violence victim (up to 12 months)
- Caretaker in two-parent family of a child who is mentally retarded or physically handicapped

The State may exempt an individual from work requirements while receiving treatment for substance abuse, as long as the person is in compliance with the treatment plan. If certain criteria are met, the individual's treatment plan may be defined and countable under the TWP job readiness activity.

17. Upon referral to the work program, the client will be assessed within 30 days to identify and prioritize the individual's strengths and needs, and translate these into realistic goals which will lead to employment and self-sufficiency. A uniform assessment tool is utilized statewide as a guide to conduct in-depth, interactive interview assessments to evaluate job skills, levels of work readiness and intermediate goals needed in order for individuals to reach their long term career goals. Individuals who have been determined to be incapacitated, by a medical review physician, or who report they are unable to work will be referred to the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and required to apply for vocational rehabilitation services and complete the intake process. A translator shall be provided to assist an individual with limited English proficiency. An Employability Development Plan (EDP) is the client's plan of action for achieving these goals. The EDP describes the responsibilities of the State, case management, and the client. The plan also describes the supportive services available to the client, lists the assigned work activity, and reinforces the consequences for failure to participate.

18. The recipient shall attend the required number of hours each week in one or more of the following allowable TANF work activity(s). When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. An individual with a language barrier shall be referred to an English as a Second Language (ESL) activity.

    The adult(s) in the TANF case will participate in one or more of the following work activities:

Job Search and Job Readiness

Job Search and Job Readiness Assistance is defined as the act of seeking or obtaining employment, preparation to seek or obtain employment, including life skills training, and substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or rehabilitation activities for those who are otherwise employable.

Such treatment or therapy must be determined to be necessary and certified by a qualified medical, substance abuse or mental health professional. A qualified professional is defined as any individual who is licensed or certified. Job search and job readiness assistance activities are supervised daily by the case manager and/or job readiness trainer.

Job readiness and job search are considered as one activity by Federal law and is limited to a maximum of 120 hours for a single custodial parent whose youngest child is under age six and 180 hours for a single custodial parent whose youngest child is age six or older in the preceding 12-month period for participation rate calculation purposes. A maximum of four consecutive weeks may be counted and reported as participation. After four consecutive weeks are reported, there must be at least a one week break (seven consecutive days) before additional participation can be included in the participation rate calculation process.

Unsubsidized Employment

Unsubsidized employment is full- or part-time employment in the public or private sector for which the state does not furnish aid or support to the employer for wages paid to the TANF recipient.

Types may include:

a. **Regular employment** is work in the public or private sector for which a person receives unsubsidized wages on an hourly, weekly, monthly basis, etc.

b. **Self-employment** is work for which a person earns income directly from one's own business, trade or profession rather than a specified salary or wages from an employer. Income may be verified by a W2 form, check stubs or written statements from customers.

Subsidized Employment

Subsidized employment is defined as subsidized employment in the private or public sector for which the employer receives a subsidy from TANF or other public funds to offset some or all of the wages and costs of employing a recipient. Subsidized employment includes the following employment models:

a. Work supplementation where TANF funds that would otherwise be paid as assistance are paid to the employer;

b. A third-party contractor, like a temporary staffing agency, serves as employer of record and is paid a fee to cover salary, expenses and success in placing employees;

c. Work study programs which involve paid employment provided by an educational institution if the student's earnings are subsidized by the educational institution; and

d. Supported work for individuals with disabilities in an integrated setting, e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation AbilityWorks. Workers with disabilities may receive individualized services such as, but not limited to, transportation, family support or additional supervision.

Employers participating in a subsidy program must submit monthly documentation to verify participant attendance data. Agency staff will monitor and review employer reports to determine whether sufficient documentation exists to substantiate reported time and to warrant a subsidy payment. This auditing process will ensure the agency only pays for and reports actual and allowable hours of participation.

Work Study

Work study is also defined as subsidized employment. Work study is an approved employment plan at an accredited college, frequently granted in addition to other student financial aid. Various public funding sources may be utilized to pay earnings for hours worked. Earnings may be paid directly to the student or applied toward the student's tuition fees.

Temporary Employment with the U.S. Census

Certain temporary employment with the U.S. Census is defined as subsidized employment. This specifically refers to temporary census workers who are hired part-time during a census campaign. The employment is not expected to last longer than three months and the income received is totally disregarded in establishing TANF eligibility and the TANF benefit amount. Employment will be verified, by the case manager, via employer wage verification forms or check stubs. Countable work hours must be based on employer reports (wage forms) or check stubs and will be projected forward up to three months.

Work Experience

Alternative Work Experience Program (AWEP) placements are only made with private non-profit or for-profit entities for no cash payment in order to improve work skills by offering training and experience for a better understanding of the work world so the individual may move more quickly into full-time employment. Individuals participating in these programs are subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements and cannot be required to participate for more hours than the total welfare benefits divided by the federal minimum wage (FMW). The maximum number of hours in any month that a participant may be required to participate in AWEP is based upon the family's combined value of TANF assistance (monthly grant, transportation stipend and participation stipend) SNAP benefits divided by the federal minimum wage. The TANF benefit amount, net out child support, will be determined during the TANF application process and at each TANF redetermination appointment for all TANF cases that are subject to TANF Work Program requirements.

TANF recipients assigned to this activity cannot displace regular workers. Based on certain criteria, private, for-profit entities may be used for AWEP placements. For example, a certain type of placement may be necessary for the participant to gain needed skills to successfully accomplish his/her career goals. Such entities must be approved in writing by the Work Programs Unit.

Community Service Programs

Community Service placements are only made with public entities and are limited to projects that serve a useful public purpose in fields such as health, social service, environmental protection, education, urban and rural development and redevelopment, welfare, recreation, public facilities, public safety, and child care. The main objective of assigning the TANF Work Program (TWP) participant to a community service activity is to improve work skills by offering training and experience for a better understanding of the work world so the individual may move more quickly into full-time employment. Individuals participating in these programs are subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements and cannot be required to participate for more hours than the total welfare benefits divided by the federal minimum wage (FMW). The maximum number of hours in any month that a participant may be required to participate in AWEP is based upon the family's combined value of TANF assistance (monthly grant, transportation stipend and participation stipend) and SNAP benefits divided by the federal minimum wage. The TANF benefit amount, net out child support, will be determined during the TANF application process and at each TANF redetermination appointment for all TANF cases that are subject to TANF Work Program requirements. TANF recipients assigned to this activity cannot displace regular workers.

AmeriCorps (VISTA)Volunteers

AmeriCorps work activities are defined as community service. **AmeriCorps** recruits and trains individuals who are willing to devote at least a year to serving in their community to meet specific needs. AmeriCorps includes two programs, AmeriCorps*VISTA and AmeriCorps*NCCC.

Vocational Educational Training

Vocational education (not to exceed 12 months) is defined as an organized educational program which offers a sequence of courses directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations that do not require an advanced degree. Such programs shall include competency-based applied learning which contributes in an individual's academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning, and problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general employability skills, and the occupational-specific knowledge and skills that prepare participants for a specific trade, occupation, or vocation.

Vocational education programs must be provided by education or training organizations, such as vocational-technical schools, community colleges, post-secondary institutions, proprietary schools, nonprofit organizations, and secondary schools that offer vocational education.

Limitation on Vocational Educational Training and Teens in School

Vocational educational training cannot exceed 12 months for any individual. No more than 30% of the individuals counting toward the participation rate in a month may meet the work requirement by participating in vocational educational training. A teen parent head-of-household attending secondary school or in an educational activity directly related to employment will be included in the 30%.

Education Directly Related to Employment

Education directly related to employment is defined as educational activities related to a specific occupation, job, or job offer for individuals who have not received a high school diploma or a certificate of high school equivalency. This includes educational courses designed to provide the knowledge and skills for specific occupations or work settings, but may also include adult basic education, English as a second language (ESL), literacy skills, GED prep classes, and supervised study sessions.

Secondary School Attendance

Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to a certificate of general equivalence is an allowable "non-core" activity for individuals age twenty and older who do not have a high school diploma or GED. Participation in this activity is not restricted to individuals for whom obtaining a GED is a prerequisite for employment. Minor parents, under age twenty, who have not completed secondary school or received a GED will be encouraged to pursue a diploma or GED. Educational activities for individuals under the age of twenty are considered "core" activities and are countable in the participation rate calculation. Educational activities for individuals age twenty and older are considered "non-core" activities and only count after the individual participates for an average of twenty (20) hours per week in a "core" activity.

On-the-Job Training

On-the-Job Training is defined as paid employment provided by a public or private employer through a contractual arrangement in which the employer provides training and skills essential to perform the job and the employer is reimbursed for the added costs associated with training. While engaged in productive work, the participant is provided additional daily supervision and training which will provide the knowledge or skills essential to fully and adequately perform the job. The participant is compensated at a rate (including benefits) comparable to that of other employees performing the same or similar jobs.

The state reimburses the employer up to 50 percent of the wages paid to the participant utilizing federal funds to offset the cost of training and supervision given to the participant. The employer is expected to retain the participant as a permanent, unsubsidized employee at the end of the training period.

Job Skills Training Directly Related to Employment

Job skills training directly related to employment is training or education for job skills required by an employer to provide an individual with the ability to obtain employment or to advance or adapt to the changing demands of the workplace. Job skills training can include customized training to meet the needs of a specific employer or training that prepares an individual for employment, including literacy and language instruction, if necessary, to enable the participant to perform a specific job or engage in a specific job training program.

19. If any adult in a household refuses without good cause to participate in work as required under TANF, the following full benefit sanction will apply. When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication to assist them in the conciliation process. If necessary and appropriate, the need for disability and language related accommodations are bases for good cause.

VIOLATION	PENALTY (WHICHEVER IS LONGER)
1st Violation	2 Months Minimum or Until Compliance
2nd Violation	6 Months Minimum or Until Compliance
3rd Violation	12 Months Minimum or Until Compliance
4th Violation	Permanent Disqualification

NOTE: For a two-parent family, the parent who was meeting work requirements, but lost TANF benefits due to the other parent's non-cooperation, may open his/her own case with the dependent children after six months.

20. The State will not reduce or terminate assistance to a single custodial parent caring for a child under age six (6) for refusing to engage in work, if the parent demonstrates an inability to obtain appropriate, quality child care. The parent's demonstrated inability must be for one of the following reasons:

    a. Appropriate child care is unavailable and/or unaffordable. Appropriate child care is defined as a licensed child care center or a family day care (home or an individual) chosen by the parent/caretaker relative to care for the child. The child care provider must be 18 years old or older.
        - Appropriate child care must be within a reasonable distance (within a 20-mile radius) of the parent/caretaker relative's home or worksite.
        - Appropriate child care must be affordable. Affordable formal child care is child care that is equal to or less than the established rates for the type of care according to the OCY Child Care Policy Manual.

b. Informal child care by a relative or under other arrangements is unavailable or unsuitable. Unavailable or unsuitable child care shall be defined as a situation involving child abuse, neglect or an unsafe environment.

If the parent/caretaker relative refuses to take the child to a particular day care center, he/she must inform the case manager of the reason for the refusal. The case manager must investigate to verify and substantiate the parent's claim of unsuitable child care. Complaints involving child abuse, neglect or an unsafe environment will be reported to the MS State Health Department, Division of Child Care Facilities Licensure. The case manager must contact the Office of Children and Youth's Designated Agent to discuss the problem and determine what other child care services are available in the area. The case manager will determine good cause for non-participation based on the investigation and information gathered.

Parental complaints regarding a breakdown in receiving child care services or against an OCY Designated Agent must be submitted in writing to the Director, Office for Children and Youth, Mississippi Department of Human Services, Post Office Box 352, Jackson, MS 39205. The parent/caretaker relative may also contact the OCY Resource and Referral telephone line (1-800-877-7882).

21. Mississippi will provide a one-time total earned income disregard opportunity for six months to TANF adults who find a job working at least 35 hours per week, at or above the federal minimum wage either: within 30 days after authorization for new TANF approvals on or after July 1, 1997; or within 30 days after the initial start date of the job readiness/job search work activity. The six-month total disregard of earnings will be available only once for new TANF approvals and ongoing cases beginning July 1, 1997, and thereafter.

    A three-month total earned income disregard will be available when the TANF case is subject to closure because of increased earnings and the individual is employed at least 25 hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage. The three-month disregard cannot be claimed in combination with the six-month disregard. The three-month disregard can be claimed again after a 12-month consecutive break in assistance.

22. If available, funds shall be used by the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) for the assessment, enrollment, certification, follow-up and performance standards as they relate to career-related training of TANF Work Program (TWP) participants. Training may be established based on employer needs in a particular area of the State. Training may also be established on an individual basis based on the individual's career goal(s)/objective(s) and training needs in conjunction with employer needs.

    The goal of the program is to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.

23. In deciding how to best use Federal TANF funds for low-income families, MDHS developed strong collaborative relationships with businesses, local agencies, faith-based groups, and community organizations for the delivery of services. Continuation and/or expansion of these initiatives are subject to availability of funding and the justification of need. MDHS may contract with public and private entities to provide services under TANF initiatives to assist families end welfare dependency and become self-sufficient. The initiatives are:

a. Intensive Youth Supervision Programs

To provide a diversionary, community based intensive supervision program for youth offenders who have been referred to the court and have not been adjudicated as a delinquent or child in need of supervision, the program goals are to:

1. reduce criminal activity,
1. encourage the youth to attend school,
2. reduce alcohol and drug abuse,
3. reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies,
4. facilitate goal development toward employment,
5. promote reunification of families,
6. develop communication and socialization skills, and
7. recognize and implement alternative methods of dealing with anger, as well as inspire youths to be more positive and effective individuals.

Individuals eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

b. Child Care Enhancements

To end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage, MDHS may provide quality, comprehensive child care services for children in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program and income-eligible, working families at risk of going onto TANF who meet Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) eligibility.

c. Responsible Fatherhood Initiative

To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, MDHS may provide comprehensive services that support and educate fathers on the importance of responsible parenthood.
The program goals are to:

1. increase public awareness concerning the impact of a father's absence,
2. assist fathers in becoming "Team Parents" and to share the legal, financial and emotional responsibilities of parenthood with the mother(s) of their child(ren),
3. improve the self-image of fathers and their families;

4. increase fathers' parental involvement in their child(ren)'s education;
5. improve academic performance and graduation rate and reduce the dropout rate of their children,
6. decrease the teenage pregnancy rate,
7. decrease juvenile crime;
8. promote two-parent families and the father's role in the family, and
9. recruit fathers and expectant fathers to volunteer as mentors to other fathers.

Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program.

d. Post Employment Assistance Programs

To end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work, MDHS may provide post employment assistance services to current and former TANF recipients who are employed. Where appropriate, case managers will work with employers to ensure reasonable accommodations are provided to employees with disabilities. Individuals with language barriers shall be referred to an English as a Second Language (ESL) activity prior to job placement. Case management will also work with potential employers to ensure reasonable accommodations and language assistance are available at the work site to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. The goals of the initiative are to increase job retention, job advancement, and self-sufficiency for former and current TANF recipients. Families eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

e. TANF Prevention/Intervention Program

To develop projects in community-based settings to prevent and reduce at-risk behaviors among youth and their families to prevent, or break the cycle of welfare dependence, MDHS may provide the following services/activities to:

1. reduce and prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies,
2. prevent/reduce substance abuse (use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products), and
3. prevent/reduce other behaviors that prevent the attainment of a high school diploma or GED.

Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program.

f. "Healthy Choices, Brighter Future" Initiative

To involve community, faith-based organizations, schools and families within the State's four congressional districts (counties) in the establishment of educational and training programs on youth leadership development and teenage pregnancy prevention MDHS may provide the following activities:

1. develop and implement a community-wide abstinence-till-marriage curriculum that teaches the social, psychological and physical effects of engaging in sexual activities,
2. teach that abstinence from sexual activity before marriage, and fidelity within marriage is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and related health problems,
3. conduct multimedia marketing campaign to reach a wide audience with the abstinence-till-marriage message,
4. develop workshops in community settings that address at-risk behaviors (i.e., dropping out of school; alcohol and substance abuse/use; teen pregnancy),
5. develop and maintain resources that will promote the abstinence-till-marriage message and allow the program to be replicated statewide, and
6. reinforce abstinence and second-time abstinence.

The goal is to reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and prevent other at-risk teen behavior. Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program.

g. Adolescent Offender Program

The program shall utilize role-model counselors to safely divert adolescent offenders from further contact with the criminal justice system. The program is designed to ensure that children remain in the home, prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, improve school attendance, and facilitate goal development that will lead to gainful employment. Individuals eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

24. If funds are available MDHS may enter into a contract(s)/agreement(s), using Federal TANF funds, with public, private, or private nonprofit entities to serve as a fiscal administrator(s) for the TANF Summer Enrichment Program in the county or counties within the State. The fiscal administrator will be responsible for managing and administering the operation of the Summer Enrichment Program in the counties within its designated service area(s). The Summer Enrichment Program is designed to fund projects in community-based settings to prevent and reduce at-risk behaviors (i.e., dropping out of school; substance abuse-use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products; teen pregnancy; dependency on welfare, etc.) among youth between the ages of 10 and 17.

25. MDHS may contract, using Federal TANF funds, with public, private, or private nonprofit entities to provide TANF Work Program services as needed statewide. All contractual services used will be procured in accordance with State Laws. The subgrant will contain performance measures which will assure TANF Work Program goals are achieved. The strategy for accomplishing the goals and objectives outlined for the work program must include utilizing the case management approach.

26. To provide assistance, using Federal TANF funds, to low-income families in resolving barriers to self-sufficiency the State may establish a Crisis Intervention Program. The program will use TANF funds to:

- Meet a TANF family's ongoing basic needs (i.e., food, clothing, shelter, utilities, household goods, personal care items, and general incidental expenses).
- Provide assistance to families experiencing an emergent need (i.e., utility payments, business start-up, etc.) that cannot be met with their own income and resources. This program is designed to deal with a specific situation or an episode of need and is not intended to meet recurrent or ongoing needs. These services will not extend beyond four months. Families are not required to be TANF eligible but must be income eligible based on the Federal Poverty Level guidelines established for the program.

The goals of the program are to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; and end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, and work.

27. Based on availability of Federal TANF funds, the following programs may be implemented through legislative appropriation:

    a. Funds may be made available to the Attorney General to implement programs that serve unmet needs of "at risk" youth in the state. The programs shall be designed to:

        - Provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
        - End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work. These programs provide safe and stable environments which help children succeed and allow their parents to work;
        - Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
        - Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

    b. TANF funds may be used for temporary care (not to exceed 45 days) of children in foster care. The placements are through emergency shelter facilities and normally do not exceed 45 days. TANF funds will not be used to duplicate Federal foster care payments. Families eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The goal of the program is to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.

    c. TANF funds may be used for the expansion of the Families First Resource Centers. To establish resource centers that would not be possible through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Grant, MDHS will advance the development, expansion and enhancement of a statewide network of community-based, prevention focused, parent resource centers that offer assistance to families. To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies the centers will:

- provide early comprehensive support for parents,
- promote the development of parenting skills,
- promote the independence of families,
- increase family stability,
- improve family access to resources and opportunities for assistance,
- focus on prevention of teenage pregnancy while supporting teen parents,
- support the needs of families with children with disabilities, and
- provide a safe place for supervised visitation.

Families eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

d. TANF funds may be used to provide family preservation services to families, with dependent children, earning at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Social workers and homemakers provide supportive services to promote the safety and well-being of children and their families, promote stability and permanency, preserve family unity. The goal of the program is to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.

e. TANF funds may be made available to the State Coalition of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) for the purpose of developing and implementing statewide programs that serve the unmet needs of youth by way of Adolescent Offenders and Teen Leadership programs. The program is designed to ensure that children remain in the home, prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, improve school attendance, and facilitate goal development that will lead to gainful employment. Individuals eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

28. The State shall establish a Segregated State program for the following state-funded programs. These programs shall count toward the State's MOE:

a. State funded scholarship programs for needy families with dependent children that began after 1995. [Mississippi Code of 1972 Sections 37-106-29, 37-106-31 and 37-157-1 amended by Senate Bill 2231(1997) and House Bill 1273(1998)]

Eligible population: A needy family is defined as a family with a dependent child(ren) and an average annual income at or below 350 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The eligible child is defined as anyone who has not yet attained their 24th birthday, continuously enrolled in a program of post-secondary education [Attorney General's Opinion (September 6, 2002)]. The eligible child is not a veteran, not a graduate or professional student, not married, not an orphan or ward of the court, and does not have legal dependents. The eligible child is living in the home; however, he/she may be absent from the home for periods while attending the post-secondary program.

The cost of a scholarship provided to the head of household and/or his/her spouse in an income eligible family shall also count toward the State's MOE requirement.

The TANF goals of this program are to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work. These programs provide safe and stable environments which help children succeed and allow their parents to work;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

b. State funded programs to increase the likelihood of school success of preschool and school-age children in needy families.

Eligible population: Preschool and school-age children from families with an income at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

The TANF goals of these programs/activities are to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work. These programs provide safe and stable environments which help children succeed and allow their parents to work;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families

29. Effective October 1, 2001, the State established a separate state program to serve needy two-parent families. State funds are used for cash assistance payments. This program will not count toward the state's MOE requirements.

Although two able-bodied parents are in the home, a dependent child is considered deprived of parental care or support when the natural or adoptive parent is unemployed. Two-parent families are only eligible if the parent is designated as the "principal wage earner."

- meets the state's definition of "unemployed," which means that he or she is not currently working or has not worked full-time for at least thirty (30) days prior to receipt of TANF benefits,
- works less than 100 hours per month,
- has not refused a bona fide offer of employment or training, without good cause, within the 30-day period prior to receipt of TANF benefits, and
- is not on strike.

All other eligibility requirements for the two-parent family are the same as the TANF (Basic) case.

To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families:

- When the TANF recipient marries, the new spouse's income will be disregarded for six months. This will allow the single parent who marries an employed person the opportunity to continue TANF cash assistance and work preparation activities without immediately losing benefits because of the spouse's income.
- Recent work history requirements will be waived for two-parent families when the parents are under 21 years of age to allow these young families to qualify for the TANF Unemployed Parent Program.

30. MDHS established the Healthy Marriage Initiative, using Federal TANF funds, to promote the well-being of children in Mississippi by encouraging the involvement of mothers and fathers in their lives. The initiative will:
    - Encourage stable family formation and healthy marriages
    - Promote responsible fathering
    - Increase paternity and child support objectives
    - Encourage community support for marriage
    - Prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies

    The Healthy Marriage Unit will collaborate with community organizations, educational institutions, and faith-based groups to provide the appropriate skills-based relationship education and services to youth and unmarried couples and to:

    - Support healthy marriage and family development/formation
    - Prevent family disruption
    - Secure permanent families for children

31. The Mississippi Department of Human Services shall implement a TANF Up-Front Diversion Program to provide assistance, using Federal TANF funds, to families with emergency circumstances. As an alternative to TANF cash assistance, a family with an emergency circumstance may be eligible for a one-time short-term cash assistance payment.

    To receive the diversion program assistance:

    - Family units must include an adult and a dependent child(ren) under 18 years of age.
    - Family members must have lived in the designated disaster areas at the time the disaster occurred.
    - Family members must currently live together in Mississippi.
    - Family members must not be current recipients of regular TANF, including Transitional Transportation or Transitional Child Care.

- Family's primary individual must sign an agreement restricting <u>any</u> member of their household from receiving TANF for a period of three (3) months.

Households will be required to pass the gross income limits standard (200% of the Federal Poverty Level). The maximum amount of resources the family may retain to be eligible is $3000.

In addition to the above, the adult(s) in the family must:

- be employed an average of 25 or more hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage;

- have documentation of the promise of a job starting within 14 days from the application date, working an average of 25 or more hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage; or

- be currently participating in a short-term work-related training program.

A $1000 payment will be issued directly to the family (parent/caretaker relative and child) to assist in resolving any short-term financial issues related to basic needs (i.e., child care, transportation, rent and relocation expenses).

32. The Mississippi Department of Human Services does not discriminate against any individual or group because of race, sex, religion, national origin, color, marital status, handicap, or political beliefs. Mississippi will follow the nondiscrimination provisions in Title I, Section 408, for any program or activity receiving funds under Public Law 104 - 193, provision in State Law and Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

33. State Law, Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated at 43-17-5(f), prohibits the displacement of regular workers by TANF recipients. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability status, age, or any other protected status is prohibited. No adult in a work activity shall be employed or assigned when another individual is on layoff from the same or any substantially equivalent job within six months before the date of the TANF recipient's employment or assignment; or if the employer has terminated the employment of any regular employee or otherwise caused an involuntary reduction of its work force in order to fill the vacancy created with an adult receiving TANF assistance. The Mississippi Department of Employment Security as established under Section 71-5-101 will appoint one or more impartial hearing officers to hear and decide claims by employees of violations.

D. Elimination of Waivers

Welfare reform and documentation waivers were eliminated by the State Legislature in 1997.

IV. FUNDING

Section 403(a)(1)(A) provides that each eligible State shall be entitled to receive for each of the federal fiscal years 1997 through 2002, a grant in an amount equal to the State family assistance grant as defined in Section 403(a)(1)(B).

A. Payments to Agency Administering the TANF Program

Payments for the TANF program will be made to the organization managing the AFDC/JOBS programs as of August 22, 1996. The Mississippi Department of Human Services is the single State agency designated by law to administer the human services programs as certified by the TANF State Plan.

B. State Payments for TANF Program

Section 405 requires that grants be paid to States in quarterly installments, based on State estimates. The State's estimate for each quarter of the fiscal year by percentage is:

For FY *2001* and Future Years

1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
25%	25%	25%	25%

Listed below is the percentage of TANF funds requested by the State for each quarter of FY 1997.

For FY 1997

1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
25%	25%	25%	25%

V. CERTIFICATIONS

The State will operate a program to provide Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) so that the children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; to end dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

This program is known as **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).**
Executive Officer of the State: **Haley Reeves Barbour, Governor, State of Mississippi**
In administering and operating a program which provides Temporary Assistance for Needy Families with minor children under Title IV-A of the Social Security Act, the State will:

1. Specify which State agency or agencies will administer and supervise the program under Part A in all political subdivisions of the State:

   a. Mississippi Department of Human Services is the agency responsible for administering the program;
   b. Division of Economic Assistance is responsible for supervising the program.

2. Assure that local governments and private sector organizations:

   a. Have been consulted regarding the plan and design of human services programs in the State so that services are provided in a manner appropriate to local populations; and
   b. Have had at least 45 days to submit comments on the plan and the design of such services.

3. Operate a Child Support Enforcement program under the State plan approved under Part D.

4. Operate a Foster Care and Adoption Assistance program in accordance with Part E, and certify that the State will take all necessary actions to ensure that children receiving assistance are eligible for medical assistance.

5. Provide each member of an Indian tribe, who is domiciled in the State and is not eligible for assistance under a Tribal Family Assistance plan approved under Section 412, with equitable access to assistance under the State program funded under this part attributable to funds provided by the Federal Government.

6. Establish and enforce standards and procedures to ensure against program fraud and abuse, including standards and procedures concerning nepotism, conflicts of interest among individuals responsible for the administration and supervision of the State program, kickbacks, and the use of political patronage.

7. Make available to the public a summary of the State plan.

CERTIFIED BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE STATE

_____
Signature

Date

Governor of Mississippi
Title

MISSISSIPPI STATE PLAN

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES

Authorized by the
Personal Responsibility and
Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193)

Reauthorized by the
Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) (Pub. L. 109-171)

Mississippi Department of Human Services

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I. OVERVIEW

Goals, Results and Public Involvement

Mississippi began the process of Welfare Reform with Legislation passed in 1993, to implement statewide changes and demonstration projects to address the needs of the State's low-income population through increased work opportunities and supportive services for adults and required school attendance and health care for children. All citizens of the State were provided opportunities for input and comments through publication and filing of the Plan for review and through a series of public meetings in locations over the State. The Mississippi Welfare Restructuring Program Act of 1993 was amended in the 1994 Legislative session and, subsequently, waivers were requested and approved by HHS, HCFA and USDA to implement the amended reform measures. Public comment was also solicited during the State Administrative Procedures filing period set by the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, at 25-43-1 through 19, prior to implementation of waivers beginning August through December of 1995.

Development of this state plan for implementation of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program established by U.S. Public Law 104 - 193 has been a two-step process. Mississippi was the first to take advantage of the TANF Block Grant funds available beginning October 1, 1996. The initial State Plan, which consisted of the then-existing State Plan for AFDC-JOBS coupled with the Federally-approved waiver projects previously adopted by the Legislature, was submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to take effect on October 1, 1996. All Federal and State public review and comment requirements having already been met.

At the same time MDHS, in coordination with other State departments and the Legislature, undertook a more comprehensive review and analysis of policy issues to develop an amended State Plan that would both meet Federal TANF requirements and take full advantage of TANF's flexibility in methods of reducing welfare dependency. The amended TANF State Plan, dated March 13, 1997, to fully implement the TANF Work Program was the product of that effort.

The TANF State Plan is designed to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies;
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families; and
- Prevent Program fraud and abuse.

Recognizing that recipient families which include adult heads-of-household, pregnant minor heads-of-household, minor parent heads-of-household or spouses of such heads-of household, unless specifically exempt, have a 60-month limit for assistance, the Agency's focus at the point of application must be the determination of work readiness or the assistance needed to become work ready, instead of the previous emphasis on determining eligibility for cash benefits.

A report compiled from comments received from ten focus group meetings held across the State during October and November 1996, and from numerous other public meetings conducted by State Legislators within their Senate and House Districts, supported the TANF goals of encouraging personal responsibility for self-sufficiency through opportunities leading to work preparedness and employment. Although progress has been made to develop resources and network with other agencies, local government and business communities, these concerns are shared by the Agency and continue to be addressed within the scope of the State Plan.

One of the most important goals of the State is to improve the lives of all Mississippians. Therefore, a series of regional hearings was held during March and April 2000 to listen to the public's concerns and suggestions as to how to improve services to Mississippi's children and families. Concerns expressed in these meetings included child care needs, transportation, teen and out-of-wedlock pregnancy, medical needs, training or employment availability and transitional benefits.

Progress is measured in part by the number of recipients who have left the assistance rolls to accept employment opportunities and by those persons satisfactorily participating in allowable work activities. The State will continue to measure progress statistically for work participation and cost effectiveness to evaluate success. Monitoring will continue through ongoing administrative fiscal accountability and reporting procedures currently in place along with additional reporting requirements related to TANF.

Needy Families

The definition of "needy families" is contained in this document under Section III, Other Provisions. Mississippi will provide services to families, residing in the state, with dependent children (under the age of 18 years), who meet the TANF income and resources criteria and deprivation outlined in the plan. Although eligibility criteria for financial assistance will be the same statewide, the level of services provided from other programs (initiatives) may vary. Other explanations regarding non-citizens, safeguarding family privacy, and rights to objective hearings are also addressed in Section III.

Work and Self-Sufficiency

Recipient work requirements and services related to attaining self-sufficiency are addressed in Section III. Each community is encouraged to become involved in the overall goal of self-sufficiency for all families. Mutual success for the community and needy families is dependent upon community awareness of the service needs and employment opportunities to be offered to meet these needs.

A network of business, education, religious, local government and nonprofit organizations was initially developed as an integral part of the "New Direction" waiver implementation. This network was expanded by the Resource Development Unit in the MDHS Division of Economic Assistance to enhance activities within the TANF Work Program. This unit coordinated the development of transportation resources and work opportunities to provide services through community resources focused on the family's needs and job readiness. Governmental, non-governmental, nonprofit and for-profit entities were engaged in this effort to ensure that Mississippi's program was successful, including the metropolitan midtown project established as a one-stop comprehensive resource center to serve low income families in that geographic area and to provide training and job placements.

Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996

- Progress has been made in moving families from welfare to work;
- More families are entering employment;
- Earnings are up; and
- TANF caseloads are down.

However, in spite of some dramatic results, there are still individuals not working or in entry level jobs with incomes that are too low or too erratic to raise their families above poverty. Under TANF, States have the flexibility and resources to develop programs that reach all families, promote success at work, and convert welfare offices into job centers. The task of welfare reform is far from finished.

The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) is ready to take the critical next steps to ensure that low-income Mississippians receive the essential supports:

- To preserve families by encouraging marriage;
- To find and maintain gainful employment;
- To provide quality child care services; and
- To reduce behaviors and environments that place youths and families at risk.

MDHS has broad discretion to provide a wide range of benefits and services and to set different eligibility standards for different types of benefits.

The State continues to explore and improve awareness of available resources and the potential for additional legislation to serve the needs for this population. Other recipients who have difficulty joining the workforce because of limited skills or experience are assigned to special work-related components and life skills training within the work program.

Employers and other community leaders and churches are encouraged to provide mentoring services within the employment setting and the community.

Benefits

Mississippi will provide financial assistance to families determined eligible based on the current standard of need, resources and maximum payment level for that size family. Maximum grants are $110 per month for the first person, $36 for the second person and $24 for each additional person. TANF monthly benefits in Mississippi are provided by means of the Debit MasterCard® card to the recipient family. Time limits are addressed in Section III of this document in accordance with the Public Law 104 - 193. Work-related sanctions for noncompliance without good cause or exemption status create a full benefit sanction. Sanctions for other noncompliance factors are administered by a 25% grant reduction or termination according to Section 408.

Supportive services provided include case management, child care and transportation assistance for training or employment, payment for work-related expenses to meet needs associated with entry into employment or training, participation stipends and job retention bonus payments and advancement services. Transitional child care and transportation services are addressed later in this plan.

Cultural Change

The culture of the "welfare" office is changing to support work and self-sufficiency by embracing the concept of immediate attachment to work for those deemed work ready and administered in a "one-stop" shop environment. Eligibility determination for benefits, case management with supportive services, and job referrals are housed in one location in as much as possible. All TANF eligibility determination and work program case management and related staff receives policy and systems interface training to coordinate all activities related to work activities, exemptions, sanctions, placement and supportive services. All new and reassigned staff is trained prior to caseload assignment on all issues in the TANF State Plan, policy manual and systems procedures to assure program conformity and understanding of the urgency, considering the 60 and 24-month maximum benefit limits, to help recipients move quickly into work activities. Recipients also receive information and training on the cash assistance and work requirements to facilitate the transition toward self-sufficiency with a strong commitment for success from both recipients and agency staff with the support of the community. Written notices are mailed to all TANF recipients when needed to inform recipients of changes.

Parental Responsibility

Parental responsibility is encouraged by the Personal Responsibility Contract which spells out agency and recipient responsibilities. The Contract also addresses the parent/caretaker's responsibility to maintain regular health care and school attendance for their children. It reinforces their responsibility to cooperate with the Division of Child Support Enforcement. The State Plan addresses services to teen parents. State legislation also addresses teen pregnancy and prevention issues in the educational setting.

Parental responsibility is further emphasized in the Employability Development Plan. The court system and law enforcement agencies are responsible for cases of domestic violence and statutory rape with referrals to appropriate service providers, including this Agency. Family planning services are available and referrals are made upon request.

Tribes

TANF eligibility determination and payments are made through the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the work-related referrals and services are handled through the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and MDHS. The Indian tribe members are provided equitable access to assistance and supportive services under the State Plan and are allowed certain income and resource exclusions as specifically provided by law. Technical assistance and/or training are provided upon their request.

Administration

The organizational structure is addressed in Section III, Other Provisions. The Mississippi Department of Human Services is the single State Agency designated by the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, Title 43, with authority to administer the TANF Program, and to make rules and regulations governing the administration of the TANF Plan. All local political subdivisions (counties) are served with at least one office in each county. The Agency contracts with public and private entities based on procurement statutory requirements and local needs. The elements of the TANF program are in place in accordance with the public filing of the TANF State Plan and subsequent changes/updates, and changes will be implemented based on this plan.

Prevention of Fraud and Abuse

Mississippi maintains a strong program of abuse prevention and prosecution for persons convicted of fraudulent receipt of benefits. Overpayments, whether agency-caused or recipient-caused (either intentionally or inadvertently), are recovered from ongoing or future benefits and through direct collections. The claims recovery process is an automated system to calculate amounts, send demand letters, and track and report collections.

Ongoing Plan Development

The state of Mississippi is submitting its FY2009 TANF State Plan revised October 1, 2008. The Plan was made available to the public for 45 days for review and comment on June 16, 2008. All comments received during this period will be compiled for administrative and legislative review to ensure appropriate consideration and modifications in the new plan. The State Administrative Procedures filing period has also been fulfilled as required in the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, at 25-43-1 through 19, with the filing of the State Plan and policy/procedures document in the Secretary of State's Office for public review and comment. The Plan will be the operational document for the TANF grant and work program with supportive services.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 increased flexibility and authorized grants to states to operate a program designed to:

- Provide temporary assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Through the comprehensive TANF Program, Mississippi is serving the varied needs of the state's low-income population. The focus of this program is to provide financial support to eligible families who are actively engaged in allowable work activities in efforts to overcome the barriers preventing them from achieving total financial independence. Mississippi's Plan emphasizes family self-sufficiency through full-time private sector unsubsidized employment of all able-bodied adults. The program also includes financial assistance to needy families and children who are not subject to work requirements and who meet the TANF exemption criteria, such as hardship, families who have left the TANF rolls and low-income families who need supportive services to maintain and upgrade their employment.

A. Waivers

Since the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 enabled the State to continue its focus on moving recipients from dependency to work and self-sufficiency, policy changes were made on TANF implementation within the scope of State authority without the need for waivers. Under State flexibility permitted in Public Law 104 - 193, Mississippi discontinued the "New Direction" waivers effective July 1997 for operation of Learnfare, Immunization/Checkups, Family Cap, AFDC-UP, Work Encouragement and WorkFirst provisions including additional waivers to enhance the WorkFirst Program (transitional child care, transitional transportation, transitional Medicaid, sanctioning exempt JOBS volunteers, and exclusion of income from incentive payments related to monitoring the waiver components). Many of the original waiver provisions have been continued within the scope of the ongoing TANF State Plan.

B. State Legislation

The Mississippi Welfare Reform Program Restructuring Act of 1993, as amended, passed by the Mississippi Legislature and approved by the Governor, set the mandate for change and authorized the Mississippi Department of Human Services to request waivers needed to

implement programs relating to full-time employment, child care, school attendance, preventive health care, and other issues. In the 1997 session of the Mississippi Legislature, public assistance statutes were amended and approved by the Governor to fully implement all TANF requirements, deleting the statute formerly authorizing demonstration projects. The law includes a full-employment program for recipients assigned to wage-paying jobs designed to increase their self-sufficiency and improve their competitive positions in the workforce. The Mississippi Code 1972, Annotated, Title 43, Chapters 1 and 17 address authority of MDHS to operate programs and pay benefits within TANF guidelines including requirements for:

- School attendance for children six through 17 years;
- Immunizations for children;
- Family benefit cap to prevent assistance increases for additional children (unless there is a twelve consecutive month break in TANF benefits);
- Minor parents to reside with a parent or adult caretaker and to continue their education at least to high school graduation or GED level;
- Work requirements with supportive and transitional services to move recipients into self-sufficiency and independence through employment; and
- Personal responsibility contract is signed by the recipient to acknowledge his/her responsibilities to the State in return for benefits. The law also includes penalties for failure to comply with these responsibilities and provisions whereby benefits can be re-approved following compliance.

C. Work Program

Mississippi's demonstration full employment program (WorkFirst) was implemented in October 1995 based on State law and waivers granted by HHS and USDA. The WorkFirst pilot project was implemented in six counties which comprised approximately 25% of the State's caseload. The WorkFirst Program offered job-ready recipients a helping hand in gaining full employment and in learning and developing new job skills though the subsidized employment component. It also provided an opportunity for businesses to expand without the high cost of employee training as AFDC and Food Stamp-Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits were diverted to wages. Under State law, subsidized job placements were new positions; regular workers could not be displaced.

The waivers originally needed to implement the subsidized work program are no longer necessary under the TANF Work Program. Mississippi continues to operate most of the work program activities in place on October 1, 1996, utilizing unsubsidized work placements as authorized in State law in Title 43 and in Titles I and VIII (Food Stamps/SNAP) of Public Law 104 -193.

III. FAMILY ASSISTANCE PLAN

A. General Provisions

1. Mississippi will conduct a program designed to provide allowable work activities that will serve all political subdivisions (counties) in the State with emphasis on providing assistance to needy families with children and providing parents with job preparation, work, and support services to enable them to leave the program and become self-sufficient to the degree that State and local resources allow.

2. Mississippi will require a work eligible individual (an adult or minor head of household or a non-recipient parent receiving assistance under the Program to engage in an allowable work activity once the State determines the parent or caretaker is work eligible, or once the work eligible individual has received assistance under the program for 24 months (whether or not consecutive), whichever is earlier.

   Mississippi will not issue assistance payments to a family that includes an adult head-of-household, pregnant minor head-of-household, minor parent head-of-household, spouse of such head-of household or a non-recipient parent who has received TANF funding for 60 months (whether consecutive or not), except as allowed by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 in regard to the 20% exemption.

3. Mississippi will ensure that a work eligible individual (an adult or minor head of household or a non-recipient parent) receiving assistance under the Program will engage in work activities in accordance with Section 407 of Title 1 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (reauthorized by DRA of 2005). Work requirements and activities are defined in the revised TANF State Plan and current supporting policy and procedures manuals and bulletins. These documents are open for public review and comment according to the Administrative Procedures Act. The work requirements and activities are tracked through the system (MAVERICS and JAWS) interface throughout the period of assistance to ensure compliance is met, appropriate penalties imposed, and time limits not exceeded.

   Mississippi will comply with the mandatory work requirements and strive to meet the participation rates required. In Fiscal Year 2000, 40% of all families receiving assistance must be in a countable work activity. The percentage increased to 45% in Fiscal Year 2001 and 50% in Fiscal Year 2002 and the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2003. Currently, the rate remains at 50% under the TANF program reauthorization. Participation rate requirements may be adjusted based on reduction in the caseload. Beginning October 1, 2001, State funds were used for cash assistance payments for two-parent families. The State does not claim these expenditures against the Maintenance of Effort requirement. Therefore, federal mandatory work requirements and participation rates do not apply to the State's two-parent families.

4. Mississippi will take reasonable and necessary steps to restrict the use and disclosure of information about individuals and families receiving assistance under the program attributable to funds provided by the federal government. Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, at 43-1-19, restricts disclosure of recipient information pursuant to federal regulations and to laws regarding use of electronically exchanged data. MDHS also provides staff training upon entry and annually thereafter with a Confidential Information Agreement setting forth policy and penalties for safeguarding information in accordance with requirements for the exchange of information received from the Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service.

5. Mississippi established a task force consisting of public and private organizations and individuals to review the incidence and circumstances of out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Based on these findings, goals were established and recommendations made to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies with special emphasis on teenage pregnancies. The State established numerical goals for reducing the illegitimacy ratio of the State (as defined in Section 403(a)(2)(B)) for federal fiscal year 1997 through calendar year 2005. The goals were:

Year	Reduction from 1995 Ratio	Ratio Goal
1998	2.5%	42.9%
1999	3.0%	42.4%
2000	4.9%	40.5%
2001	6.0%	39.4%
2002	7.8%	37.6%
2003	10.3%	35.1%
2004	11.4%	34.0%
2005	12.6%	32.8%

These findings and recommendations were provided to the Governor and the State Legislature first in January 1998 and again in January 1999. These documents have been published and are distributed to interested groups, to other organizations, and to the State Departments of Education and Health. As a result of the task force reports, new legislation was passed into law to raise the age of consent, strengthen the statutory rape laws and to establish abstinence training in the public school. Mississippi has set a goal to reduce the State's teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 2006-2015.

6. MDHS established an Abstinence/Youth Development Program within the Foundation for Families Unit to provide information and coordinate activities to promote abstinence, reduce the teen and out-of-wedlock births, and develop teen leadership throughout the State by working with public and private organizations, schools, churches and interested groups. This unit will continue an aggressive public service campaign including billboards and radio and television announcements. A video targeting teens was developed using actual teenagers and is available for viewing by groups.

The MDHS - Abstinence Unit will continue to work with related organizations and individuals to develop a program designed to reach State and local law enforcement officials, the education system and relevant counseling services that provide education and training on the problem of statutory rape so that teenage pregnancy prevention programs may be expanded in scope to include men.

B. Special Provisions

1. Mississippi will not treat families moving into the State differently than other families under the TANF program. To treat families differently would create an unfair advantage to persons moving into the State with higher benefits.

2. Mississippi will provide assistance to individuals who are not citizens of the United States only in accordance with the provisions outlined in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, State Law and subsequent amendments to the Social Security Act.

   The following qualified aliens are eligible:

   · For five years after obtaining the designated alien status:
   - An alien admitted under Section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA);
   -An alien who is granted asylum under Section 208 of the INA;
   - An alien whose deportation is being withheld under Section 243(h) of the INA, or whose removal is being withheld under Section 241(b)(3) of the INA;
   - An alien who is a Cuban or Haitian entrant as defined in Section 501(e) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980; or
   - An alien admitted as an Amerasian immigrant pursuant to Section 584 of the Foreign Operations Act, as amended.

   · For an unlimited period, the following qualified aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residence:
   - Veterans (honorably discharged for reasons other than alienage); active duty personnel (other than active duty for training), and their spouses and unmarried dependent children; and
   - Aliens who are lawfully admitted for permanent residence and have worked for 40 qualifying quarters of coverage under Title II of the SSA or can be credited with such quarters as provided for by section 435 of PRWORA (SUSC 1645), not including quarters beginning January 1, 1997 in which the alien received any Federal means-tested public benefit.

   Mississippi will provide assistance to victims of severe forms of trafficking to the same extent as aliens.

3. Mississippi has established objective criteria for the delivery of benefits and the determination of eligibility and for fair and equitable treatment, including the opportunity for recipients who have been adversely affected to be heard in a State administrative or appeal process. The State will administer the due process notification of adverse action with an opportunity for a fair hearing handled independently of the county office eligibility and/or benefit level decision to resolve any recipient benefit decreases, terminations, or related issues. Basic assistance program eligibility criteria and benefit levels are the same statewide.

4. Mississippi will not require a parent or caretaker relative, who after receiving TANF benefits for two months and is not exempt from work requirements, to participate in community services employment. However, allowable work activities include community service programs and placement in this work activity will be made based on the Employability Development Plan and available resources in that area leading to employment.

5. If TANF funding is available, Mississippi will assist TANF Work Program participants to train for, seek, and maintain employment—

   (I) providing direct care in a long-term care facility (as such terms are defined under section 1397j of this title); or

   (II) in other occupations related to elder care determined appropriate by the State for which the State identifies an unmet need for service personnel.

   The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS), Division of Economic Assistance (DEA) shall partner with the Mississippi Community College Board, Mississippi Department of Employment Security and/or other entities to provide short-term training (e.g., Certified Nurses Assistance (CNA) training for placement in a nursing home, etc.) for TANF Work Program (TWP) participants who seek employment in the eldercare workforce. Training shall be established based on employer needs in a particular area of the State. Training may also be established on an individual basis based on the individual's career goal(s)/objective(s) and training needs in conjunction with employer needs.

C. Other Provisions

1. Mississippi is making available to the public the new TANF State Plan and other State program plans and policy bulletins addressing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 in accordance with Federal and the Mississippi Administrative Procedure Law, Title 25, Chapter 43 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated. The amended State Plan with implementing policy bulletins, draft policy bulletins and copies of policy manuals are on file with the Secretary of State's Office for public inspection and comment. Provisions of the Mississippi Welfare Reform Program Restructuring Act (with waivers) were filed timely prior to implementation in 1995.

The original TANF State Plan effective October 1, 1996 contained the mandates and the Amended State Plan includes the mandates and State options. All documents have been filed for public review and comment. Thus, we have met the public review and comment requirements.

Note: Although the eligibility manuals are not attached with the State Plan for TANF, the Mississippi Department of Human Services continues to administer the statewide family financial assistance and work programs through specific instructions for eligibility determination, services and sanctions with policy and procedures manuals and supplements (bulletins) filed for public review.

2. The TANF Program is administered by the Mississippi Department of Human Services, the single State agency designated by State law for eligibility determination and spending authority. The organization is State administered with at least one full service office for intake and client service delivery located in each county with structured supervisory and regional administrative levels.

3. Mississippi will continue to provide financial assistance to needy families determined eligible under the currently established policies in the TANF State Plan and the Standard of Need and maximum payment level for that size family as prescribed in the Program Policy Manual (Volume III) and supporting policy bulletins, and the Systems Procedural Manual (Volume X). "Needy families" are identified according to ongoing income, resources, and deprivation criteria contained in these manuals. The money payment level set by State law at 43-17-5(1), is $110 for the first person, $36 for the second person and $24 for additional persons, except as restricted by the Family Benefit Cap.

4. In Mississippi, TANF monthly benefits and supportive service payments provided to individuals participating in allowable work activities or transitional programs are provided to the family by means of a Mississippi Debit MasterCard® card account. TANF supportive service payments issued to providers are paid by check or by vouchers redeemable for services.

5. Deny TANF Assistance

   a. According to the TANF prohibitions/requirements in Title I, Section 408, Mississippi will, except for individuals and families specifically exempt or excluded for good cause, deny TANF assistance to:

      - Families without a minor child residing with the parent or adult caretaker relative;
      - Families including an adult head-of-household or spouse of the head-of-household, pregnant minor head-of-household or spouse of such head-of-household, a minor parent head-of-household or spouse of such minor parent head-of-household who has received assistance under TANF for 60 months (whether or not consecutive);
      - Families not assigning certain support rights to the State;

- Families who fail to cooperate in establishing paternity or obtaining child support;
- Teenage parents without a high-school education or equivalent, who are not employed and do not attend school or an equivalent training program;
- Minor parents not living in an adult-supervised setting;
- Minor children who are absent from the home for a significant period (30 days or more). NOTE: A relative who fails to report the absence of a child within five days will be disqualified;
- Families who fail to complete up-front job search or vocational rehabilitation requirements, whichever is required;
- Families who fail to comply with the Employability Development Plan signed by the individual, to cooperate with the TANF Work Program, or to participate satisfactorily in the assigned work activity;
- Fleeing felons and parole violators; and
- Ineligible aliens.

b. In accordance with 21 USC 862a, Mississippi shall deny TANF assistance to a convicted felon.

6. Mississippi will coordinate services, where available, with public and private entities (i.e., Mississippi Departments of Rehabilitation Services, Employment Security and Mental Health, and the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, etc.) to allow TANF families with barriers (i.e., little or no work experience, domestic violence, limited English proficiency, learning disabilities, mental, physical disabilities and/or substance abuse) an opportunity to gain access to services and resources needed to obtain the highest level of self-sufficiency within the constraints of the TANF time-limits. Special screening and referral procedures will be used to identify and refer the individual for the appropriate service. Mississippi will deny benefits to individuals who fail to comply with the activities provided by these entities.

7. Hardships will be assessed starting at forty (40) months and continued eligibility determined at the end of the individual's five (5) year time limit. The following individuals, as approved, may continue to receive benefits beyond the five-year time limit so long as the State does not exceed the 20% exemption criteria:

- Adults who are determined to be temporarily or permanently incapacitated and the household income does not exceed the TANF Basic 100% Requirement.

- Parents who are required to provide full-time care for an ill or incapacitated child or adult in the home and the household income does not exceed the TANF Basic 100% Requirement.

8. Mississippi will not deny assistance to a minor parent with a child under the age of 12 weeks for failure to attend school, but will permit the minor parent to voluntarily participate in educational activities as medically appropriate.

9. Mississippi requires regular school attendance and regular immunizations for all dependent children served under TANF. This is in accordance with State Law at 43-17-5. A 25% monthly benefit reduction is imposed for failure to comply without good cause.

10. Mississippi will impose a family benefit cap to prevent increases in assistance for new children coming into the family after the initial ten months of benefits, with certain exceptions (State Law 43-17-5).

11. Mississippi will also deny assistance for ten years to an individual convicted in Federal or State court of having made a fraudulent statement or representation, with respect to the individual's place of residence in order to receive TANF assistance simultaneously from two or more states.

12. Mississippi will deny benefits to all adult TANF applicants who do not meet an exemption from work requirements, who fail to comply with job search or vocational rehabilitation activities during the 30-day TANF application processing period.

13. Recipients of SSI are excluded from the TANF assistance unit.

14. Mississippi will operate a statewide work program mandated by State law and TANF to provide work activities and supportive services (child care, work stipend, participation stipends, work related expense payments and job retention bonus payments) focused on enabling families to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency.

    State law and Public Law 104-193 provide for a full benefit sanction of TANF and comparable SNAP sanctions until compliance for families in which the nonexempt individual refuses, without good cause, to participate. The work program emphasizes unsubsidized jobs with supportive services following employment and/or transitional services following termination of the TANF grant because of increased earnings or loss of earned income disregards. The family also receives supportive services during the training and transitional services when benefits are terminated after employment.

15. Case management is the process for coordinating work activities and supportive services for TANF Work Program participants. This involves monitoring the participant's attendance and progress and amending the Employability Development Plan, component assignment, and supportive services, as necessary, to keep the participant on a path to achieving self-sufficiency. When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. Case management is performed by MDHS staff.

16. TANF mandates participation in approved work activities for all adult recipients who do not meet specific exemption criteria. All adults who are not specifically exempt will be referred for work activities. When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. An adult included in the TANF grant assistance unit may be exempt from the mandatory work requirements for one of the following reasons:

- Incapacitated and not eligible for vocational rehabilitation services
- Temporary illness or injury
- Pregnancy in third trimester
- Caretaker of a child under 12 months old (up to 12 months)
- Caretaker of an ill or incapacitated person
- Age (over 60 and under 18)
- Domestic violence victim (up to 12 months)
- Caretaker in two-parent family of a child who is mentally retarded or physically handicapped

The State may exempt an individual from work requirements while receiving treatment for substance abuse, as long as the person is in compliance with the treatment plan. If certain criteria are met, the individual's treatment plan may be defined and countable under the TWP job readiness activity.

17. Upon referral to the work program, the client will be assessed within 30 days to identify and prioritize the individual's strengths and needs, and translate these into realistic goals which will lead to employment and self-sufficiency. A uniform assessment tool is utilized statewide as a guide to conduct in-depth, interactive interview assessments to evaluate job skills, levels of work readiness and intermediate goals needed in order for individuals to reach their long term career goals. Individuals who have been determined to be incapacitated, by a medical review physician, or who report they are unable to work will be referred to the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and required to apply for vocational rehabilitation services and complete the intake process. A translator shall be provided to assist an individual with limited English proficiency. An Employability Development Plan (EDP) is the client's plan of action for achieving these goals. The EDP describes the responsibilities of the State, case management, and the client. The plan also describes the supportive services available to the client, lists the assigned work activity, and reinforces the consequences for failure to participate.

18. The recipient shall attend the required number of hours each week in one or more of the following allowable TANF work activity(s). When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. An individual with a language barrier shall be referred to an English as a Second Language (ESL) activity.

    The adult(s) in the TANF case will participate in one or more of the following work activities:

    Job Search and Job Readiness

    Job Search and Job Readiness Assistance is defined as the act of seeking or obtaining employment, preparation to seek or obtain employment, including life skills training, and substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or rehabilitation activities for those who are otherwise employable.

Such treatment or therapy must be determined to be necessary and certified by a qualified medical, substance abuse or mental health professional. A qualified professional is defined as any individual who is licensed or certified. Job search and job readiness assistance activities are supervised daily by the case manager and/or job readiness trainer.

Job readiness and job search are considered as one activity by Federal law and is limited to a maximum of 120 hours for a single custodial parent whose youngest child is under age six and 180 hours for a single custodial parent whose youngest child is age six or older in the preceding 12-month period for participation rate calculation purposes. A maximum of four consecutive weeks may be counted and reported as participation. After four consecutive weeks are reported, there must be at least a one week break (seven consecutive days) before additional participation can be included in the participation rate calculation process.

Unsubsidized Employment

Unsubsidized employment is full- or part-time employment in the public or private sector for which the state does not furnish aid or support to the employer for wages paid to the TANF recipient.

Types may include:

a. **Regular employment** is work in the public or private sector for which a person receives unsubsidized wages on an hourly, weekly, monthly basis, etc.

b. **Self-employment** is work for which a person earns income directly from one's own business, trade or profession rather than a specified salary or wages from an employer. Income may be verified by a W2 form, check stubs or written statements from customers.

Subsidized Employment

Subsidized employment is defined as subsidized employment in the private or public sector for which the employer receives a subsidy from TANF or other public funds to offset some or all of the wages and costs of employing a recipient. Subsidized employment includes the following employment models:

a. Work supplementation where TANF funds that would otherwise be paid as assistance are paid to the employer;

b. A third-party contractor, like a temporary staffing agency, serves as employer of record and is paid a fee to cover salary, expenses and success in placing employees;

c. Work study programs which involve paid employment provided by an educational institution if the student's earnings are subsidized by the educational institution; and

d. Supported work for individuals with disabilities in an integrated setting, e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation AbilityWorks. Workers with disabilities may receive individualized services such as, but not limited to, transportation, family support or additional supervision.

Employers participating in a subsidy program must submit monthly documentation to verify participant attendance data. Agency staff will monitor and review employer reports to determine whether sufficient documentation exists to substantiate reported time and to warrant a subsidy payment. This auditing process will ensure the agency only pays for and reports actual and allowable hours of participation.

Work Study

Work study is also defined as subsidized employment. Work study is an approved employment plan at an accredited college, frequently granted in addition to other student financial aid. Various public funding sources may be utilized to pay earnings for hours worked. Earnings may be paid directly to the student or applied toward the student's tuition fees.

Temporary Employment with the U.S. Census

Certain temporary employment with the U.S. Census is defined as subsidized employment. This specifically refers to temporary census workers who are hired part-time during a census campaign. The employment is not expected to last longer than three months and the income received is totally disregarded in establishing TANF eligibility and the TANF benefit amount. Employment will be verified, by the case manager, via employer wage verification forms or check stubs. Countable work hours must be based on employer reports (wage forms) or check stubs and will be projected forward up to three months.

Work Experience

Alternative Work Experience Program (AWEP) placements are only made with private non-profit or for-profit entities for no cash payment in order to improve work skills by offering training and experience for a better understanding of the work world so the individual may move more quickly into full-time employment. Individuals participating in these programs are subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements and cannot be required to participate for more hours than the total welfare benefits divided by the federal minimum wage (FMW). The maximum number of hours in any month that a participant may be required to participate in AWEP is based upon the family's combined value of TANF assistance (monthly grant, transportation stipend and participation stipend) SNAP benefits divided by the federal minimum wage. The TANF benefit amount, net out child support, will be determined during the TANF application process and at each TANF redetermination appointment for all TANF cases that are subject to TANF Work Program requirements.

TANF recipients assigned to this activity cannot displace regular workers. Based on certain criteria, private, for-profit entities may be used for AWEP placements. For example, a certain type of placement may be necessary for the participant to gain needed skills to successfully accomplish his/her career goals. Such entities must be approved in writing by the Work Programs Unit.

Community Service Programs

Community Service placements are only made with public entities and are limited to projects that serve a useful public purpose in fields such as health, social service, environmental protection, education, urban and rural development and redevelopment, welfare, recreation, public facilities, public safety, and child care. The main objective of assigning the TANF Work Program (TWP) participant to a community service activity is to improve work skills by offering training and experience for a better understanding of the work world so the individual may move more quickly into full-time employment. Individuals participating in these programs are subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements and cannot be required to participate for more hours than the total welfare benefits divided by the federal minimum wage (FMW). The maximum number of hours in any month that a participant may be required to participate in AWEP is based upon the family's combined value of TANF assistance (monthly grant, transportation stipend and participation stipend) and SNAP benefits divided by the federal minimum wage. The TANF benefit amount, net out child support, will be determined during the TANF application process and at each TANF redetermination appointment for all TANF cases that are subject to TANF Work Program requirements. TANF recipients assigned to this activity cannot displace regular workers.

AmeriCorps (VISTA)Volunteers

AmeriCorps work activities are defined as community service. **AmeriCorps** recruits and trains individuals who are willing to devote at least a year to serving in their community to meet specific needs. AmeriCorps includes two programs, AmeriCorps*VISTA and AmeriCorps*NCCC.

Vocational Educational Training

Vocational education (not to exceed 12 months) is defined as an organized educational program which offers a sequence of courses directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations that do not require an advanced degree. Such programs shall include competency-based applied learning which contributes in an individual's academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning, and problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general employability skills, and the occupational-specific knowledge and skills that prepare participants for a specific trade, occupation, or vocation.

Vocational education programs must be provided by education or training organizations, such as vocational-technical schools, community colleges, post-secondary institutions, proprietary schools, nonprofit organizations, and secondary schools that offer vocational education.

Limitation on Vocational Educational Training and Teens in School

Vocational educational training cannot exceed 12 months for any individual. No more than 30% of the individuals counting toward the participation rate in a month may meet the work requirement by participating in vocational educational training. A teen parent head-of-household attending secondary school or in an educational activity directly related to employment will be included in the 30%.

Education Directly Related to Employment

Education directly related to employment is defined as educational activities related to a specific occupation, job, or job offer for individuals who have not received a high school diploma or a certificate of high school equivalency. This includes educational courses designed to provide the knowledge and skills for specific occupations or work settings, but may also include adult basic education, English as a second language (ESL), literacy skills, GED prep classes, and supervised study sessions.

Secondary School Attendance

Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to a certificate of general equivalence is an allowable "non-core" activity for individuals age twenty and older who do not have a high school diploma or GED. Participation in this activity is not restricted to individuals for whom obtaining a GED is a prerequisite for employment. Minor parents, under age twenty, who have not completed secondary school or received a GED will be encouraged to pursue a diploma or GED. Educational activities for individuals under the age of twenty are considered "core" activities and are countable in the participation rate calculation. Educational activities for individuals age twenty and older are considered "non-core" activities and only count after the individual participates for an average of twenty (20) hours per week in a "core" activity.

On-the-Job Training

On-the-Job Training is defined as paid employment provided by a public or private employer through a contractual arrangement in which the employer provides training and skills essential to perform the job and the employer is reimbursed for the added costs associated with training. While engaged in productive work, the participant is provided additional daily supervision and training which will provide the knowledge or skills essential to fully and adequately perform the job. The participant is compensated at a rate (including benefits) comparable to that of other employees performing the same or similar jobs.

The state reimburses the employer up to 50 percent of the wages paid to the participant utilizing federal funds to offset the cost of training and supervision given to the participant. The employer is expected to retain the participant as a permanent, unsubsidized employee at the end of the training period.

Job Skills Training Directly Related to Employment

Job skills training directly related to employment is training or education for job skills required by an employer to provide an individual with the ability to obtain employment or to advance or adapt to the changing demands of the workplace. Job skills training can include customized training to meet the needs of a specific employer or training that prepares an individual for employment, including literacy and language instruction, if necessary, to enable the participant to perform a specific job or engage in a specific job training program.

19. If any adult in a household refuses without good cause to participate in work as required under TANF, the following full benefit sanction will apply. When appropriate, reasonable accommodations and language assistance will be provided to recipients to ensure meaningful access and effective communication to assist them in the conciliation process. If necessary and appropriate, the need for disability and language related accommodations are bases for good cause.

VIOLATION	PENALTY (WHICHEVER IS LONGER)
1st Violation	2 Months Minimum or Until Compliance
2nd Violation	6 Months Minimum or Until Compliance
3rd Violation	12 Months Minimum or Until Compliance
4th Violation	Permanent Disqualification

NOTE: For a two-parent family, the parent who was meeting work requirements, but lost TANF benefits due to the other parent's non-cooperation, may open his/her own case with the dependent children after six months.

20. The State will not reduce or terminate assistance to a single custodial parent caring for a child under age six (6) for refusing to engage in work, if the parent demonstrates an inability to obtain appropriate, quality child care. The parent's demonstrated inability must be for one of the following reasons:

    a. Appropriate child care is unavailable and/or unaffordable. Appropriate child care is defined as a licensed child care center or a family day care (home or an individual) chosen by the parent/caretaker relative to care for the child. The child care provider must be 18 years old or older.
        - Appropriate child care must be within a reasonable distance (within a 20-mile radius) of the parent/caretaker relative's home or worksite.
        - Appropriate child care must be affordable. Affordable formal child care is child care that is equal to or less than the established rates for the type of care according to the OCY Child Care Policy Manual.

b. Informal child care by a relative or under other arrangements is unavailable or unsuitable. Unavailable or unsuitable child care shall be defined as a situation involving child abuse, neglect or an unsafe environment.

If the parent/caretaker relative refuses to take the child to a particular day care center, he/she must inform the case manager of the reason for the refusal. The case manager must investigate to verify and substantiate the parent's claim of unsuitable child care. Complaints involving child abuse, neglect or an unsafe environment will be reported to the MS State Health Department, Division of Child Care Facilities Licensure. The case manager must contact the Office of Children and Youth's Designated Agent to discuss the problem and determine what other child care services are available in the area. The case manager will determine good cause for non-participation based on the investigation and information gathered.

Parental complaints regarding a breakdown in receiving child care services or against an OCY Designated Agent must be submitted in writing to the Director, Office for Children and Youth, Mississippi Department of Human Services, Post Office Box 352, Jackson, MS 39205. The parent/caretaker relative may also contact the OCY Resource and Referral telephone line (1-800-877-7882).

21. Mississippi will provide a one-time total earned income disregard opportunity for six months to TANF adults who find a job working at least 35 hours per week, at or above the federal minimum wage either: within 30 days after authorization for new TANF approvals on or after July 1, 1997; or within 30 days after the initial start date of the job readiness/job search work activity. The six-month total disregard of earnings will be available only once for new TANF approvals and ongoing cases beginning July 1, 1997, and thereafter.

    A three-month total earned income disregard will be available when the TANF case is subject to closure because of increased earnings and the individual is employed at least 25 hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage. The three-month disregard cannot be claimed in combination with the six-month disregard. The three-month disregard can be claimed again after a 12-month consecutive break in assistance.

22. <u>If available, funds shall be used by the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB)</u> for the assessment, enrollment, certification, follow-up and performance standards as they relate to career-related training of TANF Work Program (TWP) participants. Training may be established based on employer needs in a particular area of the State. Training may also be established on an individual basis based on the individual's career goal(s)/objective(s) and training needs in conjunction with employer needs.

    The goal of the program is to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.

23. In deciding how to best use Federal TANF funds for low-income families, MDHS developed strong collaborative relationships with businesses, local agencies, faith-based groups, and community organizations for the delivery of services. Continuation and/or expansion of these initiatives are subject to availability of funding and the justification of need. MDHS may contract with public and private entities to provide services under TANF initiatives to assist families end welfare dependency and become self-sufficient. The initiatives are:

a. Intensive Youth Supervision Programs

To provide a diversionary, community based intensive supervision program for youth offenders who have been referred to the court and have not been adjudicated as a delinquent or child in need of supervision, the program goals are to:

3. reduce criminal activity,
8. encourage the youth to attend school,
9. reduce alcohol and drug abuse,
10. reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies,
11. facilitate goal development toward employment,
12. promote reunification of families,
13. develop communication and socialization skills, and
14. recognize and implement alternative methods of dealing with anger, as well as inspire youths to be more positive and effective individuals.

Individuals eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

b. Child Care Enhancements

To end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage, MDHS may provide quality, comprehensive child care services for children in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program and income-eligible, working families at risk of going onto TANF who meet Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) eligibility.

c. Responsible Fatherhood Initiative

To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, MDHS may provide comprehensive services that support and educate fathers on the importance of responsible parenthood.
The program goals are to:

1. increase public awareness concerning the impact of a father's absence,
2. assist fathers in becoming "Team Parents" and to share the legal, financial and emotional responsibilities of parenthood with the mother(s) of their child(ren),
3. improve the self-image of fathers and their families;

4. increase fathers' parental involvement in their child(ren)'s education;
5. improve academic performance and graduation rate and reduce the dropout rate of their children,
6. decrease the teenage pregnancy rate,
7. decrease juvenile crime;
8. promote two-parent families and the father's role in the family, and
9. recruit fathers and expectant fathers to volunteer as mentors to other fathers.

Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program.

d. Post Employment Assistance Programs

To end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work, MDHS may provide post employment assistance services to current and former TANF recipients who are employed. Where appropriate, case managers will work with employers to ensure reasonable accommodations are provided to employees with disabilities. Individuals with language barriers shall be referred to an English as a Second Language (ESL) activity prior to job placement. Case management will also work with potential employers to ensure reasonable accommodations and language assistance are available at the work site to ensure meaningful access and effective communication. The goals of the initiative are to increase job retention, job advancement, and self-sufficiency for former and current TANF recipients. Families eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

e. TANF Prevention/Intervention Program

To develop projects in community-based settings to prevent and reduce at-risk behaviors among youth and their families to prevent, or break the cycle of welfare dependence, MDHS may provide the following services/activities to:

1. reduce and prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies,
2. prevent/reduce substance abuse (use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products), and
3. prevent/reduce other behaviors that prevent the attainment of a high school diploma or GED.

Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program.

f. ~~"Just Wait" Abstinence~~ "Healthy Choices, Brighter Future" Initiative

To involve community, faith-based organizations, schools and families within the State's four congressional districts (counties) in the establishment of educational and training programs on youth leadership development and teenage pregnancy prevention MDHS may provide the following activities:

1. develop and implement a community-wide abstinence-till-marriage curriculum that teaches the social, psychological and physical effects of engaging in sexual activities,
2. teach that abstinence from sexual activity before marriage, and fidelity within marriage is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and related health problems,
3. conduct multimedia marketing campaign to reach a wide audience with the abstinence-till-marriage message,
4. develop workshops in community settings that address at-risk behaviors (i.e., dropping out of school; alcohol and substance abuse/use; teen pregnancy),
5. develop and maintain resources that will promote the abstinence-till-marriage message and allow the program to be replicated statewide, and
6. reinforce abstinence and second-time abstinence.

The goal is to reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and prevent other at-risk teen behavior. Financial eligibility determination is not required for the program.

g. Adolescent Offender Program

The program shall utilize role-model counselors to safely divert adolescent offenders from further contact with the criminal justice system. The program is designed to ensure that children remain in the home, prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, improve school attendance, and facilitate goal development that will lead to gainful employment. Individuals eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

24. If funds are available MDHS may enter into a contract(s)/agreement(s), using Federal TANF funds, with public, private, or private nonprofit entities to serve as a fiscal administrator(s) for the TANF Summer Enrichment Program in the county or counties within the State. The fiscal administrator will be responsible for managing and administering the operation of the Summer Enrichment Program in the counties within its designated service area(s). The Summer Enrichment Program is designed to fund projects in community-based settings to prevent and reduce at-risk behaviors (i.e., dropping out of school; substance abuse-use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products; teen pregnancy; dependency on welfare, etc.) among youth between the ages of 10 and 17.

25. MDHS may contract, using Federal TANF funds, with public, private, or private nonprofit entities to provide TANF Work Program services as needed statewide. All contractual services used will be procured in accordance with State Laws. The subgrant will contain performance measures which will assure TANF Work Program goals are achieved. The strategy for accomplishing the goals and objectives outlined for the work program must include utilizing the case management approach.

26. To provide assistance, using Federal TANF funds, to low-income families in resolving barriers to self-sufficiency the State may establish a Crisis Intervention Program. The program will use TANF funds to:

- Meet a TANF family's ongoing basic needs (i.e., food, clothing, shelter, utilities, household goods, personal care items, and general incidental expenses).
- Provide assistance to families experiencing an emergent need (i.e., utility payments, business start-up, etc.) that cannot be met with their own income and resources. This program is designed to deal with a specific situation or an episode of need and is not intended to meet recurrent or ongoing needs. These services will not extend beyond four months. Families are not required to be TANF eligible but must be income eligible based on the Federal Poverty Level guidelines established for the program.

The goals of the program are to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; and end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, and work.

27. Based on availability of Federal TANF funds, the following programs may be implemented through legislative appropriation:

    a. Funds may be made available to the Attorney General to implement programs that serve unmet needs of "at risk" youth in the state. The programs shall be designed to:

        - Provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
        - End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work. These programs provide safe and stable environments which help children succeed and allow their parents to work;
        - Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
        - Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

    b. TANF funds may be used for temporary care (not to exceed 45 days) of children in foster care. The placements are through emergency shelter facilities and normally do not exceed 45 days. TANF funds will not be used to duplicate Federal foster care payments. Families eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The goal of the program is to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.

    c. TANF funds may be used for the expansion of the Families First Resource Centers. To establish resource centers that would not be possible through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Grant, MDHS will advance the development, expansion and enhancement of a statewide network of community-based, prevention focused, parent resource centers that offer assistance to families. To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies the centers will:

- provide early comprehensive support for parents,
- promote the development of parenting skills,
- promote the independence of families,
- increase family stability,
- improve family access to resources and opportunities for assistance,
- focus on prevention of teenage pregnancy while supporting teen parents,
- support the needs of families with children with disabilities, and
- provide a safe place for supervised visitation.

Families eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

d. TANF funds may be used to provide family preservation services to families, with dependent children, earning at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Social workers and homemakers provide supportive services to promote the safety and well-being of children and their families, promote stability and permanency, preserve family unity. The goal of the program is to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.

e. TANF funds may be made available to the State Coalition of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) for the purpose of developing and implementing statewide programs that serve the unmet needs of youth by way of Adolescent Offenders and Teen Leadership programs. The program is designed to ensure that children remain in the home, prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, improve school attendance, and facilitate goal development that will lead to gainful employment. Individuals eligible for this program are not required to be TANF eligible, but must be at or below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

28. The State shall establish a Segregated State program for the following state-funded programs. These programs shall count toward the State's MOE:

a. State funded scholarship programs for needy families with dependent children that began after 1995. [Mississippi Code of 1972 Sections 37-106-29, 37-106-31 and 37-157-1 amended by Senate Bill 2231(1997) and House Bill 1273(1998)]

Eligible population: A needy family is defined as a family with a dependent child(ren) and an average annual income at or below 350 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. The eligible child is defined as anyone who has not yet attained their 24th birthday, continuously enrolled in a program of post-secondary education [Attorney General's Opinion (September 6, 2002)]. The eligible child is not a veteran, not a graduate or professional student, not married, not an orphan or ward of the court, and does not have legal dependents. The eligible child is living in the home; however, he/she may be absent from the home for periods while attending the post-secondary program.

The cost of a scholarship provided to the head of household and/or his/her spouse in an income eligible family shall also count toward the State's MOE requirement.

The TANF goals of this program are to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work. These programs provide safe and stable environments which help children succeed and allow their parents to work;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

b. State funded programs to increase the likelihood of school success of preschool and school-age children in needy families.

Eligible population: Preschool and school-age children from families with an income at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

The TANF goals of these programs/activities are to:

- Provide assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives;
- End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation and work. These programs provide safe and stable environments which help children succeed and allow their parents to work;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families

29. Effective October 1, 2001, the State established a separate state program to serve needy two-parent families. State funds are used for cash assistance payments. This program will not count toward the state's MOE requirements.

Although two able-bodied parents are in the home, a dependent child is considered deprived of parental care or support when the natural or adoptive parent is unemployed. Two-parent families are only eligible if the parent is designated as the "principal wage earner."

- meets the state's definition of "unemployed," which means that he or she is not currently working or has not worked full-time for at least thirty (30) days prior to receipt of TANF benefits,
- works less than 100 hours per month,
- has not refused a bona fide offer of employment or training, without good cause, within the 30-day period prior to receipt of TANF benefits, and
- is not on strike.

All other eligibility requirements for the two-parent family are the same as the TANF (Basic) case.

To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families:

- When the TANF recipient marries, the new spouse's income will be disregarded for six months. This will allow the single parent who marries an employed person the opportunity to continue TANF cash assistance and work preparation activities without immediately losing benefits because of the spouse's income.
- Recent work history requirements will be waived for two-parent families when the parents are under 21 years of age to allow these young families to qualify for the TANF Unemployed Parent Program.

30. MDHS established the Healthy Marriage Initiative, using Federal TANF funds, to promote the well-being of children in Mississippi by encouraging the involvement of mothers and fathers in their lives. The initiative will:
    - Encourage stable family formation and healthy marriages
    - Promote responsible fathering
    - Increase paternity and child support objectives
    - Encourage community support for marriage
    - Prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies

    The Healthy Marriage Unit will collaborate with community organizations, educational institutions, and faith-based groups to provide the appropriate skills-based relationship education and services to youth and unmarried couples and to:

    - Support healthy marriage and family development/formation
    - Prevent family disruption
    - Secure permanent families for children

31. The Mississippi Department of Human Services shall implement a TANF Up-Front Diversion Program to provide assistance, using Federal TANF funds, to families with emergency circumstances. As an alternative to TANF cash assistance, a family with an emergency circumstance may be eligible for a one-time short-term cash assistance payment.

    To receive the diversion program assistance:

    - Family units must include an adult and a dependent child(ren) under 18 years of age.
    - Family members must have lived in the designated disaster areas at the time the disaster occurred.
    - Family members must currently live together in Mississippi.
    - Family members must not be current recipients of regular TANF, including Transitional Transportation or Transitional Child Care.

- Family's primary individual must sign an agreement restricting any member of their household from receiving TANF for a period of three (3) months.

Households will be required to pass the gross income limits standard (200% of the Federal Poverty Level). The maximum amount of resources the family may retain to be eligible is $3000.

In addition to the above, the adult(s) in the family must:

- be employed an average of 25 or more hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage;

- have documentation of the promise of a job starting within 14 days from the application date, working an average of 25 or more hours per week at or above the federal minimum wage; or

- be currently participating in a short-term work-related training program.

A $1000 payment will be issued directly to the family (parent/caretaker relative and child) to assist in resolving any short-term financial issues related to basic needs (i.e., child care, transportation, rent and relocation expenses).

32. The Mississippi Department of Human Services does not discriminate against any individual or group because of race, sex, religion, national origin, color, marital status, handicap, or political beliefs. Mississippi will follow the nondiscrimination provisions in Title I, Section 408, for any program or activity receiving funds under Public Law 104 - 193, provision in State Law and Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

33. State Law, Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated at 43-17-5(f), prohibits the displacement of regular workers by TANF recipients. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability status, age, or any other protected status is prohibited. No adult in a work activity shall be employed or assigned when another individual is on layoff from the same or any substantially equivalent job within six months before the date of the TANF recipient's employment or assignment; or if the employer has terminated the employment of any regular employee or otherwise caused an involuntary reduction of its work force in order to fill the vacancy created with an adult receiving TANF assistance. The Mississippi Department of Employment Security as established under Section 71-5-101 will appoint one or more impartial hearing officers to hear and decide claims by employees of violations.

D. Elimination of Waivers

Welfare reform and documentation waivers were eliminated by the State Legislature in 1997.

IV. FUNDING

Section 403(a)(1)(A) provides that each eligible State shall be entitled to receive for each of the federal fiscal years 1997 through 2002, a grant in an amount equal to the State family assistance grant as defined in Section 403(a)(1)(B).

A. Payments to Agency Administering the TANF Program

Payments for the TANF program will be made to the organization managing the AFDC/JOBS programs as of August 22, 1996. The Mississippi Department of Human Services is the single State agency designated by law to administer the human services programs as certified by the TANF State Plan.

B. State Payments for TANF Program

Section 405 requires that grants be paid to States in quarterly installments, based on State estimates. The State's estimate for each quarter of the fiscal year by percentage is:

For FY *2001* and Future Years

1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
25%	25%	25%	25%

Listed below is the percentage of TANF funds requested by the State for each quarter of FY 1997.

For FY 1997

1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
25%	25%	25%	25%

V. CERTIFICATIONS

The State will operate a program to provide Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) so that the children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; to end dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

This program is known as **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).**
Executive Officer of the State: **Haley Reeves Barbour, Governor, State of Mississippi**
In administering and operating a program which provides Temporary Assistance for Needy Families with minor children under Title IV-A of the Social Security Act, the State will:

1. Specify which State agency or agencies will administer and supervise the program under Part A in all political subdivisions of the State:

   b. Mississippi Department of Human Services is the agency responsible for administering the program;
   b. Division of Economic Assistance is responsible for supervising the program.

4. Assure that local governments and private sector organizations:

   a. Have been consulted regarding the plan and design of human services programs in the State so that services are provided in a manner appropriate to local populations; and
   b. Have had at least 45 days to submit comments on the plan and the design of such services.

3. Operate a Child Support Enforcement program under the State plan approved under Part D.

4. Operate a Foster Care and Adoption Assistance program in accordance with Part E, and certify that the State will take all necessary actions to ensure that children receiving assistance are eligible for medical assistance.

5. Provide each member of an Indian tribe, who is domiciled in the State and is not eligible for assistance under a Tribal Family Assistance plan approved under Section 412, with equitable access to assistance under the State program funded under this part attributable to funds provided by the Federal Government.

6. Establish and enforce standards and procedures to ensure against program fraud and abuse, including standards and procedures concerning nepotism, conflicts of interest among individuals responsible for the administration and supervision of the State program, kickbacks, and the use of political patronage.

7. Make available to the public a summary of the State plan.

CERTIFIED BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE STATE

_____
Signature Date

Governor of Mississippi
Title