

**Testimony before the  
Health and Human Services Committee of the 127<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

*Legislative Document No. 368, An Act To Integrate the State's General Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs.*

**Diana Brown, BSW - Case Manager  
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Good afternoon Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine and members of the Health and Human services Committee, my name is Diana Brown and I am a case manager and social worker and I have years of experience with working with low income families who utilize programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and General Assistance. I am here today to testify in opposition of Legislative Document No. 368, An Act to Integrate the State's General Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs.

The TANF program is a program to help children and their parents while the family works toward becoming self-supporting. As a case manager and social worker I work mostly with families. I work with single mothers or fathers and couples that have young children. Many families that I have worked with that receive TANF benefits have a physical or mental health disability in the family. Most families I work with have a child in the family that has many demands for services around school meetings, medical appointments, psychological appointments, medication management appointments, etc. and coordinating the demands of services for the child that has a medical or mental health condition makes it extremely difficult for the parent to hold down a job. The TANF program has been useful for the folks I have worked with to help them ensure their basic needs, such as rent, housing supplies, diapers, wipes, etc. are paid for until we can get a plan in place for the family to become self-supporting.

While the family receives TANF the TANF worker as well as myself and the family has goals to either help the parent find work and daycare/support for the children or help the parent(s) go back to school to ensure they have the tools they need to find and keep a good job. As a case manager I will also refer the family to apply for SSI or SSDI for the family member with a disability and wait for approval. However, many families I work with are faced with multiple barriers to finding work that can support the family and many will be denied for SSI or SSDI benefits. In this case, if the family I am working with loses TANF benefits before they are able to support themselves, they are at risk for losing their home, not having enough food, and running out of the bare necessities like diapers, wipes, soap, shampoo, toilet paper and other household products. This is when as a case manager I would refer the folks I work with to request general assistance for the necessities until we figure out a solution.

General Assistance is a program administered through municipalities which purchases basic necessities for individuals who are without means to pay for such services, so many folks I work with who have lost TANF benefits but are still not self-supporting, may require general assistance from the town to get by and prevent the family from losing their housing, going without food and basic necessities. General Assistance provides financial support to keep the family safe!

I and others come before you today because we are concerned with the proposal to integrate the State's General Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs. This proposal states that a person who has exhausted the 60-month lifetime limit on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program benefits is ineligible to receive municipal general assistance program benefits. This

means that most of the families I work with who have lost their TANF benefits would no longer have a last resort for help in desperate situations.

My greatest concern is that families with young children are going to have absolutely no resources to stay safe. They will have no way to get the basic needs. The little ones I work with are going to be out of diapers, hungry, have no power, no heat, and maybe no housing. I see firsthand that folks are struggling even on TANF. Families are faced with barriers that prevents them from "getting ahead." So to me, preventing families from using the last resort of General Assistance, after they have already lost TANF, is like cutting the strings on a parachute after they had to jump from a falling plane. General assistance is a resource for anyone experiencing financial hardships and should be there for our most vulnerable population, young children and their families!

For these reasons I strongly urge you to reject the proposed bill, An Act to Integrate the State's General Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs, and keep the general assistance the way it is, a last resort resource to be all of our safety nets!

Jackson, M E