

THE TANF MISERY INDEX CLIMBED TO A RECORD NATIONAL HIGH IN 2012

The TANF misery index is the sum of the percent of poor families (or poor children) *not* receiving TANF and the percent gap between the TANF benefit and the official poverty line. The misery index has a maximum value of 200. The higher the misery index, the worse TANF is performing in alleviating family poverty.

Table 1. NATIONAL TANF MISERY INDEX 1996 - 2012			
	A.	B.	C.
	Percent of Poor Families With Children <i>Not</i> Receiving TANF	Percent Gap Between TANF Benefit and Poverty Line	Misery Index (A+B)
1996	28	65	93
1997	36	66	102
1998	46	66	112
1999	51	66	117
2000	53	68	121
2001	57	69	126
2002	59	69	128
2003	62	69	131
2004	63	70	133
2005	64	70	134
2006	67	71	138
2007	70	72	142
2008	72	71	143
2009	72	72	144
2010	73	72	145
2011	73	72	145
2012	74	73	147

Table 1 shows the national TANF misery index from TANF’s enactment in 1996 to 2012, the most recent year for which poverty counts are now available. Column A shows the percent of poor families *not* receiving TANF, approximated based on the difference between the annual count of the number of poor families with children below age 18, and the average monthly number of TANF



recipient families.¹ Column B shows the percent gap between the median state TANF benefit for a family of 3 with no income and the official monthly poverty guideline for a family of 3. Column C shows the annual misery index, the sum of the figures in Columns A and B.

The TANF misery index has climbed considerably since TANF's enactment in 1996 to replace AFDC,² rising from 93 in 1996 to 147 in 2012. The index has increased in every year except 2011 when it was the same as in 2010.

Most of the growth in the misery index has been from the declining participation of poor families in TANF. The percent of poor families not receiving TANF soared from 28% in 1996 to 74% in 2012. TANF now enrolls far fewer poor families than SNAP, the program formerly known as Food Stamps. In FY 2011, the most recent year for which SNAP household type data are available, five times as many families with children received SNAP (9.8 million monthly) as received TANF (1.9 million monthly).

The gap between the median state TANF benefit and the poverty line was already quite large at 65% when TANF was enacted in 1996. The gap grew to 73% in 2012. In 2012, the \$427 median state benefit for a family of 3 with no income was but 27% of the monthly \$1,591 poverty guideline for a family of 3. Although the SNAP benefit is intended to cover only food needs, while the TANF benefit is supposedly intended to cover all basic needs except health care, in 2012 the \$526 SNAP benefit for a family of 3 with no income exceeded the TANF benefit for a family of 3 with no income in three-quarters of the states.

Appendix Table A shows the TANF misery index in each state in 2012.³ Column A shows the percent of poor *children* not receiving TANF, approximated based on the difference between the

¹ Data sources for Table 1: TANF caseload data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services caseload reports, available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource-library/search?area=2377&topic\[2351\]=2351&type\[3084\]=3084](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource-library/search?area=2377&topic[2351]=2351&type[3084]=3084); poverty data from the U.S. Census Bureau Historical Poverty Tables, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/families.html>; TANF benefit level data from the Urban Institute's Welfare Rules Database at <http://anfdata.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>.

² AFDC is the acronym for Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

³ Data sources for Appendix Table A: TANF caseload data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services caseload reports, available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource-library/search?area=2377&topic\[2351\]=2351&type\[3084\]=3084](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource-library/search?area=2377&topic[2351]=2351&type[3084]=3084); poverty count data from the U.S. Census Bureau state poverty data, available at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032013/pov/pov46_000.htm; and TANF benefit level data from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report authored by Ife Finch and Liz Schott, *The Value of TANF Cash Benefits Continued to Erode in 2012*, available at <http://www.cbpp.org/files/3-28-13tanf.pdf>.

annual count of poor children in the state, and the average monthly number of TANF recipient children in the state. Column B shows the percent gap between the official monthly poverty guideline for a family of 3 and the state TANF benefit for a family of 3 with no income. Column C shows the annual misery index, the sum of the figures in Columns A and B.

In 2012, the misery index ranged from a high of 182 (Mississippi) to a low of 106 (Maine). The median state misery index was 157.

Legal Momentum promotes gender equity, personal and economic security for women and girls, an adequate safety net, and an end to poverty through targeted litigation, public policy advocacy, research, and education. To subscribe to Legal Momentum's Women & Poverty listserv, send an email to tcasey@legalmomentum.org with "subscribe" in the subject line.

February 2014.

Appendix Table A. STATE TANF MISERY INDEX, 2012

	A.	B.	C.
	Percent Of Poor Children Not Receiving TANF	Percent Gap Between Benefits and Poverty Line	Misery Index (A+B)
Alabama	88	86	174
Alaska	75	54	129
Arizona	94	83	177
Arkansas	94	87	181
California	47	60	107
Colorado	86	71	157
Connecticut	79	58	137
Delaware	79	79	158
DC	65	73	138
Florida	91	81	172
Georgia	95	82	177
Hawaii	69	67	136
Idaho	97	81	178
Illinois	88	73	161
Indiana	93	82	175
Iowa	69	73	142
Kansas	90	73	163
Kentucky	82	84	166
Louisiana	95	85	180
Maine	36	70	106
Maryland	77	64	141
Massachusetts	60	61	121
Michigan	84	69	153
Minnesota	78	67	145
Mississippi	93	89	182
Missouri	81	82	163
Montana	86	68	154
Nebraska	88	77	165
Nevada	87	76	163
New Hampshire	66	58	126
New Jersey	78	73	151
New Mexico	80	76	156
New York	74	52	126
North Carolina	94	83	177
North Dakota	88	70	158
Ohio	65	72	137
Oklahoma	94	82	176
Oregon	56	68	124
Pennsylvania	76	74	150
Rhode Island	77	65	142
South Carolina	90	86	176
South Dakota	81	64	145
Tennessee	76	88	164
Texas	95	83	178
Utah	93	69	162
Vermont	73	60	133
Virginia	80	76	156
Washington	67	70	137
West Virginia	81	79	160
Wisconsin	78	59	137
Wyoming	97	62	159