



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION
Economic Services Administration
Post Office Box 45440 Olympia WA 98504-5440

August 14, 2023

Mary B. Jones
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) Certifying Officer
Administration for Children and Families
330 C. Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Ms. Jones:

On behalf of Washington's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program - known as *TANF/WorkFirst* - I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments in response to the Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, United States Department of Health and Human Services's request: [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) Data Reporting for Work Participation \(Office of Management and Budget #0970-0338\)](#).

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) supports or is neutral on most of the content of the package, with the exception of the following:

- **Unsupervised Homework Time**
The proposed draft Work Verification Plan Guidance (TAB D) asserts that a client's engagement in unsupervised homework time may not be counted towards meeting the Work Participation Rate. This is in contrast to [45 CFR §261.60\(e\)](#), which states that *1 hour of unsupervised homework time for each hour of class time may count as work participation hours*. Yet, the draft guidance presents the opposing view, stating throughout the document that unsupervised homework time may not count and that only supervised activities are countable towards the Rate. Washington respectfully requests that these references be made consistent with current, prevailing federal regulation. This ensures clear guidance to states and that effort made by TANF clients successfully engaged in education activities is fully considered for purposes of the Work Participation Rate.
- **Excused Absence Calculation**
How excused absences should be calculated in regards to work participation hours within the proposed draft Work Verification Plan Guidance (TAB D) appears to be inconsistent with [45 CFR §261.60\(b\)](#), which allows for *"up to 80 hours of additional excused absences..."*. The proposed guidance asserts that the *"...absence policy cannot be converted to an hourly standard (e.g., 10 days cannot be converted to 80 hours)"*. Washington respectfully requests that this reference be made consistent with current, prevailing federal regulation. This ensures clear guidance to states and that effort made by TANF clients successfully engaged in activities is fully considered for purposes of the Work Participation Rate.

- **Vocational Education Training Programs**

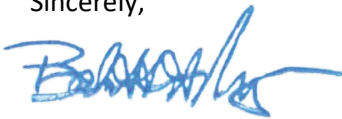
Washington requests clearer guidance within the proposed draft Work Verification Plan Guidance (TAB D) on how vocational educational training programs should be outlined in work verification plans. Vocational training and certificates vary significantly throughout the state by region, locale, and over time with employment market fluctuations. It appears that in order for engagement in vocational education to be counted towards the work participation rate, states must list all vocational training and certificate programs which they engage participants in. This is both impracticable and would result in much more frequent updates to the work verification plan, which impacts both state and federal partners. Washington asks that the guidance be clarified to indicate that the training example is not meant to be prescriptive and that states have flexibility in this area.

Below is additional feedback for consideration:

- [45 CFR §261.60\(b\)](#) and the proposed draft Work Verification Plan Guidance (TAB A) both reference 10 **federal holidays**. There are now 11 federally recognized holidays, including Juneteenth which was made a federal holiday by the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act in 2021.
- The proposed draft ACF-199&209 TANFSSP Data Report Instructions (TAB G) for **gender coding** include the options “M,” “F,” “Non-Binary”, “Uses a different term”, and “Refused”. This does not align with how Washington’s legacy eligibility system is currently configured to capture this data. It would be helpful to also include an “Unknown” category for gender. The “Refused” category does not adequately crosswalk to Washington’s current system infrastructure.
- Regarding TANF&SSP Data Report Layout (TAB J) in the TANf SECT2 PERSON tab, **there are two items that are no longer in use**, which are not indicated as such. We understand that item #23’s description (row 29, col B) should note that the item is “NO LONGER IN USE” and its example of contents should be 0 (row 29, col G). Similarly, for item #27, the description (row 33, col b) should indicate that the item is “NO LONGER IN USE” and its example of contents should be 00 (row 33, cols G and H).

We appreciate the collaborative opportunity to provide feedback on this draft guidance package to support data collection and performance reporting for the TANF program.

Sincerely,



Babs Roberts, Director
Community Services Division