

How Temporary Assistance to  
Needy Families (“welfare”)  
federal block grant policy has  
made parenting mostly  
impossible\*

by Diane R. Pagen, LMSW, Social Worker

\*And why/how to do something about it

Dedicated to Gerald and all the kids I have met as a social worker



GERALD

TO AID  
DEPENDENT CHILDREN

So that dependent children can grow up in their own families, the Federal Government and the States provide cash allowances.

More children will thus have a chance to live normal, wholesome lives in their own homes.

**SOCIAL SECURITY BOARD**

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Temporary Assistance to Needy Families “TANF,” the United States’ core income distribution program, created with the purpose of meeting basic human needs of families, in 2018 is now primarily:

- a) a **behavior modification** program
- b) **unrestricted money** for states to spend on projects related and unrelated to poverty reduction, with a mechanism built in to increase the dollar amounts available to states
- c) completely vulnerable to **mismanagement** as the federal government has devolved all responsibility to the states for their use of the grants

States are keeping significant amounts of their federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families block grants at the end of each year and enrolling ever fewer people.

WTF?

# TANF: Unspent “welfare” block grant portions 2011-2016

	2011	2013	2015	2016
Wyoming	\$32,000,000	\$21,237,376	\$24,195,852	\$22,959,134
Tennessee	\$60,000,000	\$59,303,874	\$244,261,591	\$386,789,603
Florida	\$134,500,000	\$493,863	\$0	\$55,170,948

*Urban Institute, Welfare Rules Databook*

# Wyoming (2017)

Population: 579,315

Population below FPL: 63,724

Wyoming TANF recipients:



# Wyoming TANF caseload (individuals) 2016

**1,036**

TANF to Poverty ratio= 5/100

# What people need vs. what people get

	FPL 2018 Family of 3	State Standard of Need	Maximum monthly TANF benefit
Wyoming	\$1731	-----	\$602
Tennessee	\$1731	\$1066	\$185
Florida	\$1731	\$303	\$303

*In these three states, maximum payment is the same for families with no other income source.*

*Urban Institute, Welfare Rules Databook, 2012*

## Kentucky

TANF to poverty ratio 1996: 55 out of every 100 poor families

2016: 20 out of every 100 poor families

Unspent welfare block grant portions:

2015: \$30, 228,102

2016: \$65,958,190

Caseload drop over one year:

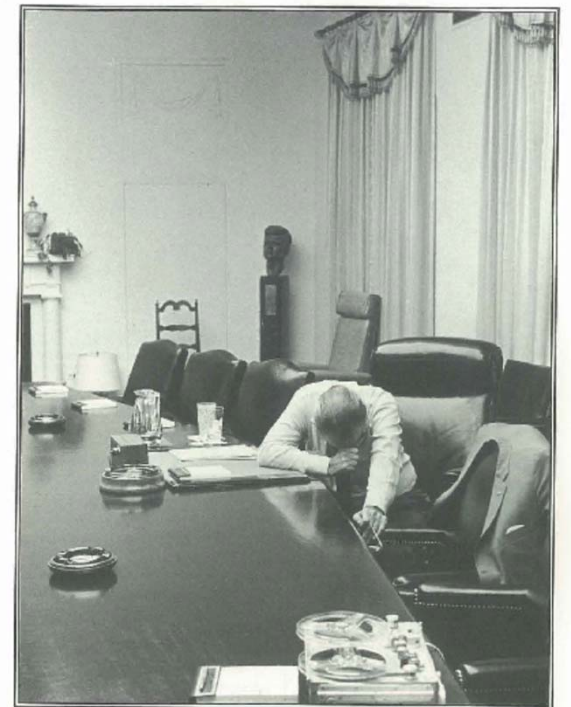
October 2016: 62,952 Kentucky children and adults

December 2017: 39,023 THIS IS A REDUCTION OF 30%

“Dear Diane,

I am generally aware of these terrible circumstances. The Kentucky state legislature has not taken it up yet. I will share your information with them...”

Julian Carroll, KY State Senator, July 2018



President Lyndon Johnson in the White House, July 1968

Portions of TANF block grants go unspent in nearly every state, going back several years.

California, 2002 →

← New York, 2013  
\$104 million



Diane R. Pagen, LMSW, 2018

# Purposes of TANF

## ADC 1935 (Aid to Dependent Children)

- Provide a small income to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes.

## TANF 2018

- Assisting needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes.
- Preventative measures for out of wedlock pregnancy
- The encouragement of two parent families
- The reduction of the dependency of needy parents by assisting with job preparation.

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The bulk of block grant funds that are spent are used for programs related to finding work, resume writing, etc.

In all three of the states shown as examples, more than 80 percent of the block grant is spent on non-cash, compulsory work activities.

August 11, 2011  
Year for Mass

Ms. Diane R. Pagen  
31 Meredith Street  
Delhi, NY 13753

Dear Ms. Pagen:

Thank you most sincerely for your letter of July 22, 2011, together with the enclosed copy of your article. Your thoughtfulness is deeply appreciated.

Please know how very grateful I am for your kindness in bringing to my attention, as a matter of social justice, your concern about the amount of government funding being spent on job training rather than on direct assistance to those most in need. Be assured that I will bring it to the attention of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the New York State Catholic Conference, and our archdiocesan Catholic Charities Office.

With prayerful best wishes for a blessed remainder of the summer, I am,

Faithfully in Christ,



Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan  
Archbishop of New York

Income without work?

Or work without income?



One effect of low TANF uptake and inadequate cash assistance: Child deaths

Unattended candles and smoke detectors both missing and inoperative are being blamed in the deaths Monday night of two St. Albans children who were alone when a fire broke out in their Tioga Drive home.

“All too often our members respond to fires where our children are victims,” FDNY Commissioner Daniel Nigro said. **“Our mission is to make certain all New Yorkers learn from this tragedy and obtain working smoke detectors for their home.”**





Christmas 2016



**AGONY**

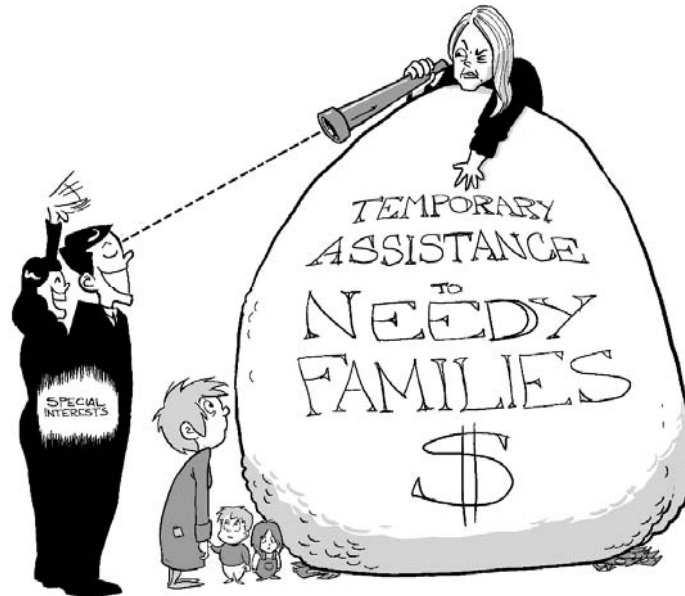
**Radiator blast burns sisters to death in Bronx apartment**

ANDREW SAVILICH/DAILY NEWS

Peter Ambrose mourns daughters Ibanez, 2, (top left) and Scylee, 1, who died Wednesday after radiator valve blew in apartment building city uses to house homeless.

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# State TANF administrators + TANF federal funds



Diane R. Pagen, LMSW, 2018

Presented by Diane R. Pagen, LMSW

[www.dianepagen.com](http://www.dianepagen.com)

Please go to my website after the conference to download a copy of the presentation and share with your state representative.

Please visit [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org) to download the TANF to Poverty one sheet for your state and share it.

Please visit [mlwiseman.com](http://mlwiseman.com) to read papers by Peter Germanis on TANF, to whom I am grateful for his expert clarifications on TANF funding and reporting.