



Public Interest Law Advocates from Across the Country Urge the Biden Administration to Stop States from Funneling TANF Funds to Anti-Abortion "Crisis Pregnancy Centers" (CPCs)

The CPC industry is a multimillion-dollar enterprise that siphons public funding intended for low-income people while failing to fulfill any of TANF's statutory goals

December 11, 2023

Tara Murtha // tmurtha@womenslawproject.org

PENNSYLVANIA - Women's Law Project (WLP) along with our partners, the California Women's Law Center, Gender Justice, Legal Voice, and Southwest Women's Law Center submitted a comment supporting the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families' [Proposed Rule](#) on Strengthening Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as a Safety Net and Work Program, RIN 0970-AC97.¹

You can find the comment [here](#).

TANF is a federal block grant program primarily intended to provide direct temporary cash assistance to low-income pregnant women, dependent children, and their caretakers. TANF grants are distributed to the states, which have historically enjoyed broad discretion allocating the funds.

Overbroad discretion has led to conspicuous erosion of TANF's intended purpose of providing direct cash assistance for families. Under the current rules, [79%](#) of people who qualify for TANF are denied it. Black children have the greatest likelihood of living in states with the lowest benefits and with programs that reach the fewest families in need.

WLP and our partners support the Department's proposed "reasonable person" standard and framework for assessing whether states' TANF expenditures accomplish the program's purposes. This proposed framework preserves flexibility for the states, consistent with congressional goals, while providing much needed clarity on the proper use of TANF funds.

"Families in crisis need and deserve the meager cash-assistance benefit to which they are entitled," said **Amal Bass, co-executive director of WLP**. "Anti-abortion politicians shouldn't deprive vulnerable people of basic safety-net support to finance anti-abortion activists running the [multimillion-dollar](#) CPC industry. The lack of evidence that CPCs are reasonably calculated to fulfill TANF goals adds insult to injury."

The Department already recognized that spending TANF funds on CPCs is likely unreasonable under the proposed standard. The CPC industry's opposition to contraception makes that conclusion inevitable. This extremist ideological stance belies evidence that access to contraception improves economic security and

¹ We appreciate the assistance of Aleshadye Getachew and Carrie Flaxman, Democracy Forward Foundation, in the preparation of this comment.

[reduces maternal and infant deaths](#). It also directly contradicts the purported premise of the CPC industry's existence.

The CPC industry justifies siphoning of funds away from low-income people, including children and pregnant people, by deceptively claiming to provide “free” material support for clients. In practice, CPCs typically leverage limited material support to coerce clients into program participation. This conditional system of support reflects the patronizing belief about clients that, as a popular CPC program [states](#), “giving things away free only enables our clients and fosters the entitlement mentality.”

“The CPC industry takes money from babies and uses it to coerce their mothers into debunked nonsense programming like abstinence-only classes to ‘earn’ a pack of diapers they could have purchased with the TANF funds taken from them,” said **Tara Murtha, director of strategic communications at Women’s Law Project and co-author of the landmark report [Designed to Deceive: A Study of the Crisis Pregnancy Center Industry in Nine States](#)**. “No reasonable person would justify this scheme. We thank the Department for exploring how to increase accountability for how states spend TANF dollars and considering our comment.”

Pennsylvania currently double-funds the anti-abortion CPC industry by [diverting TANF](#) funds on top of state contract dollars. In August, Governor Shapiro [announced](#) the state will stop sending public dollars to the CPC industry and will not renew its longtime contract with Real Alternatives, the [controversial](#) anti-abortion umbrella organization that has received [at least \\$134 million dollars](#) in public funds including TANF while overseeing a chain of CPCs in Pennsylvania.

Per Governor Shapiro’s announcement, Pennsylvania’s state contract with Real Alternatives will expire December 31, 2023.

“CPCs have also been defunded in Minnesota and Michigan,” said **Susan J. Frietsche, co-executive director of WLP**. “We’re grateful to both the Department and state officials for taking action to ensure anti-abortion careerists can’t grab safety-net funds away from low-income pregnant people and children to fund an industry that [endangers them](#).”

###