



# Help for FAMILIES with Low Income: TANF

Presented by Maine  
Equal Justice Partners



# TANF and ASPIRE

**TANF** stands for **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families**. It is a cash benefit for families with minor children in their home. In order to get TANF you must meet certain eligibility rules.

**ASPIRE** stands for **Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment**. It is the education, training, and work program in which most parents getting TANF must participate.

# TANF Eligibility

To get TANF you must have one or more minor children that live with you. Your child(ren) must be “**deprived**” of the care and support of at least one parent.

## This means that:

- 1) The parents are **not** living together and one parent is **not** playing a major role in parenting the child; **OR**
- 2) The parents are living together but:
  - One parent is disabled or incapacitated; **or**
  - Both parents are unemployed or underemployed but at least one has a history of working.

## Income Eligibility For New TANF Applicant Households that Include an Adult

Number in filing unit	Chart 1 - BASIC			Chart 2 - SPECIAL NEED*				
	Gross Income Test	S.O.N.	Maximum Grant	Gross Income Test	S.O.N.	Maximum Grant +	Special Need	= Total
1	485	294	230	578	494	230	200	430
2	762	463	363	855	663	363	200	563
3	1,023	620	485	1,116	820	485	200	685
4	1,286	780	611	1,379	980	611	200	811
5	1,548	938	733	1,641	1,138	733	200	933
6	1,811	1,096	856	1,904	1,296	856	200	1,056
7	2,072	1,255	981	2,165	1,455	981	200	1,181
8	2,335	1,414	1,105	2,427	1,614	1,105	200	1,305
Additional Member	+262	+159	+124	+262	+159	+124	+200	+124

\*Families who pay more than 75% of their income for housing (including rent or mortgage payments and property tax or home insurance) receive a special housing needs benefit of \$200 per month. Be sure to use Chart 2.

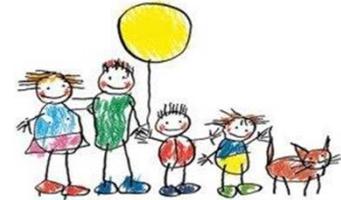
In 2015, the Maine Legislature  
**Eliminated the “Gross Income Test” for ongoing TANF recipients.**

This change will prevent many from abruptly losing assistance when they get a job.

Before this change a family would lose all of their TANF benefits if they got a job that paid even \$1 over the so-called “gross income test.”

For example, if a mom with two children got a job that paid gross wages of just \$1024 a month she would lose all her TANF. That’s because her income was over \$1,023—the TANF gross income test for her family size. Losing TANF also meant that families lost help with important work supports that they could get through the ASPIRE Program. This abrupt loss of assistance set families back just as they were starting to get their feet on the ground.

Now, if a family who has been receiving TANF has income, DHHS will ignore the gross income test and do a calculation to see if the family remains eligible for a TANF benefit. Here's an example:



Mary is a single mom with 2 children. She's been getting TANF benefits for a few months and just got a job as a CNA. Mary will be working 32 hours per week and earning minimum wage of \$7.50 per hour. Here's how her TANF grant will be calculated:

$\$7.50 \times 32 = \$240$  per week  $\times 4.3 = \$1,039$ /month. **(Under the old rules Mary would have lost TANF as soon as she went to work because her income was more than the "gross income test" of \$1,023)**

However, let's apply the income disregards that the TANF program uses and see if Mary may continue to be eligible for help from TANF.

First, TANF disregards the first \$108 per month of earned income.

$$\text{\$1039 (Mary's income) minus \$108} = \text{\$931}$$

Then TANF disregards one-half of the remaining income:

$$\text{\$931 divided by 2} = \text{\$466—this is Mary's "countable income" for TANF purposes.}$$

We then subtract this countable income from the TANF “standard of need,” indicated on the table on slide 4. (\$620 for a family of 3)

$$\text{So } \text{\$620} - \text{\$466 (Mary's countable income)} = \text{\$154}$$

**Mary's new TANF benefit will be \$154 per month.**



## What else does the elimination of the Gross Income Test mean for Mary and her family?

**Potential eligibility for the Special Housing Needs.** If a family spends 75% or more of their income for rent, they would be eligible for an additional \$200 per month in Special Housing Needs from TANF.

For example, Mary lives in Cumberland County and her rent is \$900 per month. Let's see if \$900 is more than 75% of Mary's income. Mary's income is \$1039 in wages and \$154 from TANF. [ $\$1039 + \$154 = \$1193 \times .75 = \$894.75$ ]

So Mary spends just a little over 75% of her income on rent, therefore, she would qualify for the extra \$200 in Special Housing Needs for **a total a TANF grant of \$354 per month.**



## What else does the elimination of the Gross Income Test mean for Mary and her family? (continued)

**Help with Work Supports through ASPIRE will continue.**

- Because she is still eligible for a TANF grant, Mary is also eligible to get **child care** paid for through ASPIRE;
- get **mileage reimbursement of 30 cents per mile** for her travel to and from work and daycare;
- any needed **car repairs up to \$500** per year if her car breaks down or needs repair.
- Additionally, Mary's job as a CNA requires her to wear uniforms. As she's still eligible for TANF/ASPIRE, she can get up **to \$300 per year for uniforms** required for her job.
- More information about ASPIRE services is available at:  
<http://www.mejp.org/sites/default/files/TANF-ASPIRE-guide.pdf>

**This extra help from TANF/ASPIRE will enable Mary to get solidly on her feet and give her the security she needs to maintain employment.**

# **ASPIRE Assessment Process**

In December 2013, DHHS started a new assessment process in the ASPIRE program for TANF recipients.

The Department of Vocational Services at Maine Medical Center conducts the assessments over the course of two sessions to identify peoples' strengths and barriers so that TANF/ASPIRE can do a better job working with them to provide the appropriate supports and services to meet their employment goals.

Based on the assessment results, Maine Medical provides a report to the ASPIRE caseworker who should work with the TANF participant to create a family contract to help them meet their goals and provide appropriate accommodations based on any mental or physical disabilities.

# ASPIRE ORIENTATION

You must attend an ASPIRE Orientation as part of the TANF/ASPIRE application process. If you cannot get to the DHHS office for Orientation due to lack of transportation or child care, a worker can meet you at a more convenient location.

At Orientation, DHHS staff will explain the ASPIRE program. You will then meet with an ASPIRE specialist individually and sign a Family Contract Amendment (applicants sign a Family Contract with their application so this is an amendment).

You will also be asked to participate in the comprehensive work assessment. Support services such as child care and transportation reimbursement is available for the assessments. Once the two step assessment has been completed, you will meet again with your ASPIRE Specialist to review the recommendations from the assessment and make a plan. This might require another amendment to the Family Contract.

When meeting with the ASPIRE Specialist, think about:

What you want to do; and

What support services you will need.

You should be given a list of all the support services. Check off what you need. If you are not given a list, ask for one or use the list in MEJP's TANF/ASPIRE booklet (pages 15-17).

# Who is Required to Participate in ASPIRE?

Parents who get TANF are required to be in ASPIRE unless they are **exempt**.

## **People are exempt if they are:**

- A parent with a child less than one year old. (You cannot get this exemption if you are a teen parent and don't have your high school diploma.) In a two-parent family that is eligible for TANF because one parent is disabled. We believe that the other parent can be exempt if there is a child less than one. (Please call us if you run into this problem.) Parents can only get this exemption for a total of 12 months in all the time they get TANF;
- VISTA volunteers; or
- In a household where a parent is needed in the home to care for a disabled family member who is living in the household. The need for care must be verified through statements from a licensed medical professional.

**Even if you are not exempt, you still may have good cause for not being in ASPIRE.**

# Required Hours of Participation

Your required hours of participation will depend on your family.

## **Single parents *without* children under six (6) years old.**

- Single parents without children under 6 are required to participate 30 hours per week.

## **Single parents *with* children under six (6) years old.**

- If you are a single parent with a child under 6, the ASPIRE rules allow you to do 20 hours per week instead of 30. Talk to your ASPIRE Specialist if you think 20 hours a week is better for you and your family.

# Families with two parents.

- *If you get TANF because **one of you has a physical or mental health problem**, then the other parent will have to participate just like a single parent, with one exception. The parent who does not have a physical or mental health problem is required to participate 30 hours per week even if they have a child under the age of 6 years old. (see previous slide).*
- *If you are getting TANF for unemployed parents, then it works like this:*
  - If you get help with child care from ASPIRE, then the two of you, combined, will have to do 55 hours per week.
  - If you do not get child care costs paid by ASPIRE, then the two of you combined must do a total of 35 hours per week.

# What Counts as “Work”

- ***Paid work.***
- ***Volunteer work or work experience*** (also known as “TEMP”). This is unpaid work at any public or nonprofit agency.
- ***Work study*** through your college or university. (Work-study income does not affect your TANF or Food Supplement benefits.)
- ***Job search*** for up to 6 weeks in any year.
- ***On the Job Training (OJT)***. OJT is up to 26 weeks of training after being hired for pay at a work place. Up to half of the wage is paid to the employer by DHHS.
- ***Field training***. Field training is a placement for up to 26 weeks at a work site that will help you reach your career goal. It should give you real training for something that you want to do.
- ***Vocational education*** for up to 12 months.
- ***Study time***. While you are in school, study time counts. ASPIRE will count one (1) hour for each hour of class time. Be sure to count all of the hours you spend in labs (not just the credit hours) as well as class time.

# Can I Choose the Activities I Do?

The law requires that DHHS consider “to the maximum extent possible” the kind of activities you want to do. DHHS must have a very good reason to disagree with you as long as you do the number of hours required in one of the activities that counts as “work”. If your choice of activities is denied and you don’t think DHHS had a good reason, you should strongly consider appealing (we will cover appeals in more detail).

# Family Contract

You and your ASPIRE Specialist will then fill out a Family Contract saying what you will do and what services they will provide you. Be sure to keep your Family Contract so that you can refer back to it as necessary. If you disagree with anything in the contract, you have the right to appeal.

For example, if you do not get the kind of training or support services you need, you can appeal.

**You are required to sign the contract.** Signing it will not stop you from appealing to change the contract. There should be a box on the bottom of the contract that you can check to indicate that you disagree with what is in the contract. If the box is not there, write in “I disagree with parts of this contract” and tell your ASPIRE Specialist that you would like a conciliation meeting (see page 38 in the booklet for more information).

# “Good Cause”

Many people, for many reasons, can't do the number of hours required or cannot do what is being asked. Good cause reasons are listed on pages 25 & 26 of the booklet.

Here is a list of “good cause” reasons. Some relate to one's ability to participate in ASPIRE on an on-going basis. Others relate to missing an appointment with a worker or failing to do an ASPIRE activity on a particular day.

- The need to care for a family member with special needs.
- A physical or mental health problem.
- You had to appear in court or you were in jail.
- Lack of services like child care or transportation needed to participate.
- Bad weather that also causes others not to participate.
- Must travel more than 2 hours round trip for activity (1 hour each way).
- You are unable to participate because of domestic violence, including:
  - Physical or emotional injuries caused by abuse,
  - Legal proceedings, counseling or other activities related to the abuse,
  - The abuser actively interferes with your participation, or
  - The location or other aspect of participation puts you or your child at risk.

# Accommodation

**If good cause is found to exist**, the ASPIRE Specialist shall offer reasonable alternative participation requirements.

This can mean:

- Reducing the number of hours you must participate in ASPIRE;
- Counting your hours in an activity that isn't usually countable (for example, taking your child to needed therapy appointments); or
- Allow you not to participate at all. (DHHS will reevaluate this at least every 6 months.)

If the ASPIRE Specialist decides that that good cause does not exist and you disagree, you can request a **Conciliation Meeting** or a **Fair Hearing**. We'll talk more about this later.

# ASPIRE Support Services

- **Child care** for hours engaged in activities.
- **Dental care** to stop pain or needed for work.
- **Transportation costs** (30 cents per mile for up to 400 miles per week)
- **Car Repair expenses** (up to \$500 per year)
- **Car Insurance** (max of \$300 for time enrolled)
- **Eye Care** (including glasses up to \$200 per year)
- **Books and Supplies** (up to \$750 per academic year)
- **Clothing and Uniforms** (limited to \$300 per year)
- **Tuition and Mandatory School fees** (up to \$3,500 per academic year)
- **Occupational Expenses** (up to \$500 for time enrolled)
- **Other services** (up to \$500 per calendar year)

# What is a Sanction?

- You can be “sanctioned” if DHHS decides that you have failed to follow the ASPIRE rules without good cause.
- A family may be sanctioned for missing an appointment or for failing to do what is required in the “Family Contract.”

# TANF Full Family Sanction rules

**First Sanction:** The first time that someone is sanctioned, DHHS will reduce their TANF benefit by removing the adult from the grant. For example, a family of 3 getting \$485 per month would be reduced to \$262 per month (the maximum grant for a family of 2 without an adult on the grant).

**For the first sanction:**

- They can get their full TANF benefit back as soon as they comply with all TANF/ASPIRE rules, but they must comply within 90 days;
- If they do not comply within 90 days, DHHS will end TANF benefits for everyone in their household. After that they can get their TANF back once they comply with all program rules but they will have to reapply for TANF.

**Subsequent Sanctions:** The second time and any time after that a family is sanctioned, the whole family will lose benefits right away. They can get their TANF benefits back as soon as they sign a new Family Contract with ASPIRE and follow all program rules.

**Before any family is sanctioned the family must be given the chance to show if they have “good cause” for not following the rules. (see Good Cause, page 25 and 26 in booklet)**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** The sanction rules are not the same when a family is receiving an “extension” of benefits after they have passed the 60-month time limit. If they are receiving benefits under an extension and do not follow the rules, the whole case will close, even if it’s the first time that they are sanctioned.

# Sanctions

## Advocacy Tips:

- If people getting a notice of possible sanction can't reach their ASPIRE Specialist directly, they should leave a detailed voicemail stating why they have good cause and state they want a fair hearing if the worker disagrees; don't just ask the case worker to call back. They should also call repeatedly until they hear back from the ASPIRE Specialist.
- People in this situation should keep notes of when they call and what message they left. They should ask to speak with the supervisor if they are unsuccessful in reaching the worker within a reasonable time.

# TANF Time Limit Rules

As of January 2012, a family cannot get TANF for longer than 60 months unless they qualify for an “exemption” or an “extension.” This is a lifetime limit.

They will get a notice from DHHS no later than 120 days before they reach their 60-month time limit. This notice must give the family the opportunity to meet with their ASPIRE Specialist to see if they qualify for an exemption or extension.

- A hardship “**extension**” means that they can get benefits after they reach the 60-month limit.
- An “**exemption**” stops the clock—meaning that months they get TANF while exempt will not count toward the time limit, including months in the past.

It is important that families meet with their ASPIRE Specialist if they want to continue to receive TANF. If someone does not get an extension or exemption, their TANF will end at 60 months.

# What months count toward the 60-month time limit?

Any month that an individual got TANF cash assistance as an **adult** since June 1, 1997 will count toward that family's 60-month time limit.

## A month *will* count:

- Whether the adult got TANF in Maine **or** any other state or U.S. territory;
- Even if the adult was in the Parents as Scholars program; **or**
- If the adult got TANF by mistake for that month unless they repaid that amount. Once they repay the overpayment for that month it will no longer count toward the limit.

Note: If there are two adults in the household, as soon as one of the adults reaches the 60 month time limit, everyone in the household will lose TANF unless they qualify for an extension or exemption.

**Exemptions:** Some months *don't* count—these months are “**exempt**” from the time limit.

A month does not count toward the time limit when:

1. Only the children were on the grant, either because 1) the parent(s) were on SSI; 2) the parent(s) were under sanction; or 3) the children were living with a caretaker relative who was not on the grant.
2. The adult got only a non-cash benefit from the TANF Program like Alternative Aid, Emergency Assistance, or any TANF transitional benefit like child care, transportation or “worker supplement” benefits.
3. The family was living at one of the Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, MicMac, or Maliseet reservations.

**Extensions:** People may be able to get help from TANF after they reach the 60-month limit if they qualify for a “hardship extension”

DHHS will decide if a family can get an extension when they are about to reach their 60-month time limit. In most cases (and unless noted below) an extension will last for as long as the adult meets the requirements for it. They will be expected to renew the extension at least every 6 months.

**Verification:** The adult will have to collect the information to show that they are eligible for an extension. If they have trouble getting this information, their ASPIRE Specialist must help them.

## Some reasons people may get an extension:

- They have experienced **domestic violence**;
- They have a **physical or mental condition** that prevents them from keeping a steady job;
- They need to stay home most of the time to care for a **disabled family member**;
- They are in an approved **education or training** program;
- They are **working** at least 35 hours a week and still need TANF;
- They are **pregnant**;
- They **lost a job** they had for at least 12 months through no fault of their own after they got 60 months of TANF; **or**
- Certain **emergencies**

# Domestic Violence Extension

## How is “domestic violence” defined in the rules?

- A physical act or threat of physical injury;
- Sexual abuse of a child or caretaker of a child; or
- Psychological effects of the abuse.

## In order to receive a domestic violence extension a person must:

- ✓ Work with their ASPIRE Specialist to create an employment plan. This plan will include steps to reduce the threat of violence and prepare for employment. DHHS is required to give the family information about services offered by domestic violence resource centers; **and**
- ✓ Provide records or other documentation from the court, law enforcement, child protective, social services, a mental health or other medical provider; or other trustworthy source; **or**
- ✓ Provide a sworn statement from a person other than themselves with knowledge of the domestic violence. This might be someone from an agency that helps people who have experienced domestic violence or a friend or family member.

**NOTE:** This extension is available to a family at any time that they qualify for it, even if they have passed their 60<sup>th</sup> month and have not received TANF for a period of time.

# Disability Extension

## How is “disability” defined?

A disability means that a person has a physical or mental condition that makes them unable to engage in gainful employment. This means that a person must have a condition that greatly limits their ability to support the family.

**Important NOTE:** the condition does not need to be as severe as it does to qualify for SSI or Social Security Disability benefits. Just because a person is denied SSI does not necessarily mean that they are ineligible for a disability extension.

## In order to receive an extension based on disability a person must:

- Provide medical evidence of a physical or mental condition that limits their ability to work;
- *If required by DHHS*, apply for disability benefits from SSI, Social Security Disability Benefits, Railroad Retirement Disability, or MaineCare in the disability category;
- *If required by DHHS*, provide evidence that they have applied for SSI or Social Security Disability benefits and the status of the application if required by DHHS. (e.g. - letter from a lawyer or a notice from the SSA);
- *If required by DHHS*, show that they are complying with a rehabilitation plan through the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, or that they are on a waiting list for VR.

**NOTE:** This extension is available to a family at any time that they qualify for it, even if they have passed their 60<sup>th</sup> month and have not received TANF for a period of time.

# Extension for Caring for a Disabled Family Member

**Someone may qualify for an extension based on needing to care for a family member if:**

- They are needed to care for a family member who lives in the same home and is on the TANF grant, or would be on the grant if not for their disability. For example, a disabled child receiving SSI is not on the TANF grant, but would qualify if not receiving SSI;
- The adult or child needing care has a temporary or permanent mental or physical illness or incapacity and no other care is reasonably available;
- They provide proof from a qualified medical professional:
  - ✓ Verifying the household member's illness or disability; and
  - ✓ Verifying that the household member needs full-time care. Full-time care means care that reasonably prevents the caretaker from being able to work; **and**
  - ✓ develop a plan for care for the disabled family member to enable a return to employment for the individual or other plan for support in anticipation of the end of cash assistance.

**NOTE:** This extension is available to a family at any time that they qualify for it, even if they have passed their 60<sup>th</sup> month and have not received TANF for a period of time.

# Education or Training Extension

**Someone may qualify for an education/training extension if:**

In their 60th month of receiving TANF they are in good standing and making good progress toward completing their education or training program that is approved by DHHS.

**This means they must:**

- ✓ Maintain at least a 2.0 GPA (grade point average);
- ✓ Participate for the required number of hours and verify that participation; and
- ✓ Provide their ASPIRE worker with their financial aid award letters and grades as they become available.

**Please note:** The following education and training programs do not qualify for an extension: (1) Adult Basic Education; (2) GED activities; (3) English as a Second Language (ESL); or (4) High School.

# Working Families Extension

**Someone may qualify for the working family extension if:**

- they are working at a paying job for at least 35 hours a week; **and**
- they are still financially eligible for TANF.

**You can visit our website at [http://www.mejp.org/tanf\\_work.htm](http://www.mejp.org/tanf_work.htm) to determine whether someone still qualifies for TANF while they are working.**

# Pregnancy Extension

## **Someone may qualify for the pregnancy extension if:**

- She is in the last trimester of her pregnancy when she reaches her 60th month of TANF assistance; **and**
- She is the only adult (or minor parent head-of-household) on the TANF grant in the household.

**Length of extension:** One extension of up to 6 months. This extension can be used for 3 months in the last trimester of pregnancy and the first three months after the child is born.

# Job Loss Extension

## Someone may qualify for the job loss extension if:

- They have been employed for at least 12 months **after** they reach their 60-month time limit. This doesn't have to be 12 months in a row, just 12 months in total after leaving TANF. There is no limit on the number of these extensions a family can get provided they work 12 months between extensions.
- They lost a job through no fault of their own (*see “good cause” for job loss in our TANF time limit guidance ([http://mej.org/PDF/New Maine TANF Time Limit Rules.pdf](http://mej.org/PDF/New%20Maine%20TANF%20Time%20Limit%20Rules.pdf)); and*
- They applied for unemployment benefits, but were not eligible because they didn't have enough earnings to qualify.

# Emergency Situation Extension

## How is “emergency situation” defined?

Emergency situation means circumstances that: (1) are beyond the control of the family; and (2) prevent the adult(s) in the household from working.

## Examples of an emergency may include:

- The death of a child, parent, or spouse;
- Homelessness due to a disaster such as fire, flood, or other natural disaster; or
- Being the victim of a violent crime.

These examples all sound very serious. But remember, that what is needed for an emergency extension is something beyond the family’s control and prevents the adult from working. This could also mean that a period of homelessness or a divorce/separation that leaves a family without income could be considered an emergency.

There is no limit on the number of Emergency extensions that a family can get if they meet the requirements for this extension.

In determining whether to grant an extension to a family that has reached 60 months, DHHS will consider whether the family meets the requirements for that extension.

**But, even if the family meets the requirements for an extension, DHHS will *deny* the extension request if:**

- The adult turned down a job offer or quit a job without “good cause” within the last year;
- The adult was sanctioned two or more times in the last year because they didn’t cooperate with ASPIRE, Support Enforcement, or Quality Control; **or**
- Within the last three years, they were sanctioned for intentionally violating a program rule to get benefits for which they were not eligible.

## **What if someone disagrees with a DHHS decision to deny a request for an exemption or extension?**

DHHS must give people a written notice telling them that their request for an exemption or extension has been approved or denied. If it is denied, they must explain the reasons for the denial and tell the person how to appeal that decision.

### **People must request a fair hearing within 30 days if they want to appeal.**

If someone decides to appeal, they should tell their ASPIRE Specialist that they want a fair hearing. A fair hearing offers a chance to be listened to by a fair hearing officer. The fair hearing officer will look at the record and the law to make a new decision in writing.

Under this new rule, people will *not* be eligible for continued TANF assistance while waiting for the decision from the appeal. This means that TANF will end as the notice states. But, if they win their appeal, they will get retroactive benefits back to the time set by the hearing decision.

# Your Appeal Rights!

You have the right to appeal if you disagree with any action or decision made about your TANF cash benefit, Food Supplements or MaineCare, or any decision about what ASPIRE requires you to do or what support services it provides.

If you decide to appeal, tell the specialist who made the decision that you want a fair hearing.

If you are appealing a decision to stop or reduce your TANF cash benefit, then you must request a hearing **within 10 days from the date of the notice if you want to continue getting the same amount of benefits until you get a fair hearing decision.**

If you lose the hearing, you will be charged an overpayment for any amount you were overpaid.

**OR**

If you want a fair hearing, but **do not want your TANF benefits continued at their current level until you get a decision from a fair hearing, you must request a hearing within 30 days** or you will lose your right to have a fair hearing.

# Transitional Benefits

(see pages 33-35 of booklet)

- **Transitional Child Care** (For former recipients who leave TANF for wages. Request within 12 months of leaving.)
- **Transitional Transportation** (For former recipients who leave for wages. **Request within 12 months of leaving.**) **Recently increased from 12 to 18 months of benefits.**
- **Transitional Food Supplement** (For anyone leaving TANF. Keep same level of Food Supplement Benefit as when on TANF for 5 months. Should be automatic. **Will get notice that you have to reapply for FS at the end of the 5 months.**)
- **“Worker Supplement” Payment** (For former recipients who leave TANF for wages and are getting Food Supplement benefits. Should be automatic. An extra \$15 in FS benefit.)

# Who is Eligible for Parents as Scholars?

(See Parents as Scholars booklet)

PaS is limited to 2,000 participants at any one time. As of September 2015 there are less than 115 parents enrolled in PaS, so there is still plenty of room in the program.

**You are eligible for the PaS program if all of the following are true:**

1. You are eligible for TANF;
2. You are "matriculating " (enrolled) in a two or four-year post-secondary degree program;
3. You do not already have a bachelor's degree in a field where there is work available to you;
4. You do not have the skills to earn at least 85% of Maine's median wage (\$995 per **week** for a family of three);
5. The degree you will be receiving will improve your ability to support your family; and
6. You have the aptitude to complete the educational program that you have chosen.

# How Do I Apply for PaS?

**If you are NOT getting TANF benefits now**, you must first apply for TANF benefits at your regional DHHS office or **on line at My Maine Connection**. The same application is used for TANF and PaS benefits. (Remember that you must be eligible for TANF in order to be eligible for PaS.) You must participate in the orientation meeting and meet with ASPIRE Specialist.

**If you are already enrolled in school** or have already been accepted, tell your ASPIRE Specialist that you want to participate in the PaS Program. Ask for the PaS application form, fill it out and give it to the ASPIRE/PaS Specialist, along with:

- a. Your letter of acceptance from the college or university you'll be attending
- b. Your financial aid award letter; (see Tuition and Mandatory Fees on page 15 and talk to your ASPIRE Specialist if you are unable to get financial aid) and
- c. Your class schedule.

**If you are not currently in school** or have not yet been accepted, tell your ASPIRE Specialist that is your goal and ask that it be written into your Family Contract. You will be required to participate in ASPIRE in other ways until you start school. Then once you have your letter of acceptance, financial aid award letter and class schedule, present it to your worker along with the PaS application.

# Do I have to go to school full-time?

PaS students must be enrolled in school full-time with the expectation that they will finish their degree in the "normal" time for that program (either 2 years or 4 years). However, the rules allow students more time to finish if they have "good cause"

## Good cause can help people in two ways.

1. Good cause can help a person who needs **more time to finish their program**. A person with good cause may be given up to 1 ½ times the normal amount of time to complete their program. This would allow a student to take fewer credit hours in a semester. A student with good cause can take:

- Up to 6 years to complete a 4-year program; and
- Up to 3 years to complete a 2-year program.

Students who need even more time than this to complete school because of a disability must be given that time as a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act

2. **The number of hours a student is required to participate each week can be reduced** if the student has "good cause." Normally, students who have been in PaS for more than 2 years are required to participate in additional hours of "work-site experience." These additional hours may also be reduced for good cause.

# Expectations

To remain in PaS, you must make "satisfactory progress" in your program. To maintain satisfactory progress, you will have to meet the standards of the school that you attend, or at least **maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA)**.

**Attend classes** as scheduled. Many PaS participants are now required to verify the time they spend in class. This is usually done by having the student sign a paper given to them by DHHS, verifying they attended classes.

Give your ASPIRE/PaS Specialist a copy of your **financial aid award** letters, and

Give your ASPIRE/PaS Specialist **copies of your grades**, as they become available.

If you do not meet these requirements, then your ASPIRE Specialist may insist that you return to TANF and the ordinary ASPIRE program. This decision must be made in writing and you must be given the opportunity to appeal it.

# Alternative Aid

(see handout)

**Alternative Aid helps families with children who are *not* receiving TANF** resolve emergencies that prevent them from getting or keeping a job. For example, the program provides help with car repairs, childcare, uniforms, housing-related emergencies, or even dental work if those things are needed to help you get or keep a job. Aid is given in the form of a voucher and can equal up to three months worth of TANF benefits (\$1,455 for a family of 3).

You're eligible for Alternative Aid if you meet the asset and other non-income eligibility requirements for TANF (such as deprivation), and you have a job or are looking for one. For example, if there are 3 people in your family and your gross income is less than \$2,165, (133% of the Federal Poverty Level) you may be eligible for Alternative Aid.



**Questions or Comments?**