Background:

Since the recession began in early/mid 2008 TANF cases began a slow, but steady climb in some of the hardest hit areas of the country. Increases in TANF have coincided with increased jobless rates and declining unemployment insurance protections.[1] Although TANF caseloads in some states have stayed essentially flat or declined[2] during this period of increased unemployment and increases in other social services and the national TANF caseload remains relatively low when compared to its earlier rates[3], individual states, including the many of the nation's largest states are witnessing marked increases in TANF participants. Moreover, the troubled economy may be prompting more families to turn to federal school nutrition programs[4] and another indicator[5] of potential TANF caseload increases is the burgeoning rate of SNAP (food-stamp) applicants—a record 31.8 million Americans received food stamps at the latest count, an increase of 700,000 people in one month with the United States in recession.[6] Although food-stamp eligibility criteria is significantly less stringent than those for TANF, the marked need for additional support and services only foreshadows a growing need among Americans hardest hit by the recession.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) includes an expansion of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program dollars available to states, if they demonstrate an increase in spending for programs that help low-income parents move toward self-sufficiency.[7] Like previous recessions, the current downturn has caused increased unemployment and is likely to cause increases of TANF participants. Although rates remain consistently low, the recession is causing an increase in TANF participants in states across the country. In some states, applications are rising, foreshadowing more people potentially receiving benefits.

As unemployment tops 16%[8], 23 of the 30 largest states, which account for more than 88% of the nation's total population, see welfare caseloads above year-ago levels.[9] In fact, TANF rolls, nationally, have risen about ½ % with 27 states reporting increases.[10] Not only is the rate of TANF participants increasing, but also is the type of person seeking TANF. In many states, TANF applicants are middle-class—or higher—individuals who have lost jobs, savings, and the ability to fully support themselves and their families. Others are returning to TANF years after they thought

---

[1] http://www.bitsofws.com/index.php/2009/06/22/numbers-on-welfare-see-sharp-increase/
[2] https://www.policyarchive.org/bitstream/handle/10207/17808/TANF_pr_021704.pdf?sequence=1
[3] http://www.bitsofws.com/index.php/2009/06/22/numbers-on-welfare-see-sharp-increase/
[4] http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2008-08-19-free-reduced-lunch_N.htm
[5] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[6] http://money.cnn.com/2009/03/05/news/economy/foodstamps.reut/index.htm
[7] http://www.publicconsultinggroup.com/arra/
[8] http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t12.htm
[9] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[10] http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2009/02/02/us/02welfare_graphic2.ready.html

they had found permanent work and independence.[11] These increases follow a decline of 68% since the federal law imposed work requirements, time limits and penalties for participants. In fact, some state numbers are predicted to rise in 2009 as the economic recession continues to take hold.[12]

Although TANF caseloads still remain far lower than in the mid and late-1990s, toward the end of 2008, caseloads increased. State officials have seen the increases amid surging layoffs and after years of falling or stable caseloads. As outlined below, the number of TANF cases is rising in some states and projected to rise in others.[13]

- In **Arizona**, there were a reported 83,702 TANF participants in the state in October, an increase of 2.4% from the prior month. The FY 2009 budget assumes the TANF caseload will grow by 2.5%[14] however as of June 2009 Arizona has witnessed an increase of 7.6%.[15]
- In **California**, CalWORKs cases have increased 10.4%[16] over 2007 levels and TANF participants appear to have more barriers than in previous years.[17] In November 2008, CalWORKS revised its average forecasted caseload increases from 3.7 percent per year to 7.2 percent per year.[18] According to the most recent survey of the state, California's TANF caseload has increased 10.4% over last year's cases.[19]
- **Florida** is among the hardest hit in the current economic downturn and its TANF cases have soared by 14.2%[20] and the number of people receiving TANF has soared by 50 percent in Fort Myers over the past 1 1/2 years, overall the state had seen an increase of four percent just in October.[21] Miami-Dade had the largest increase of Florida's major urban counties - a jump of 30 percent. Broward County [is] up about eight percent.[22]
- As a result of raising TANF caseloads (5.2%[23]) in **Massachusetts**, the State has requested and received 20 percent funding from the TANF Contingency Fund this fiscal year and is expected to receive funding again in FY10, the allocation for Massachusetts is capped at 10 percent of its TANF block grant. The state is eligible to receive up to $45.9 million over two years.[24]
- In **Nevada**, the economic slowdown has hit the tourism industry hard and as a result, the State's unemployment rate has hit a 14-year-high, 6.2 percent. Although its overall TANF caseload has not spiked, its caseload is 47 percent higher than projected.[25]

[11] *See* http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/08356/936366-84.stm; http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/12/16/ST2008121603153.html
[12] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/caseload/2008/2008_recipient_tan.htm
[13] *See* http://www.necn.com/Boston/Business/2008/12/29/Welfare-cases-on-the-rise-in/1230586309.html;
http://www.nashuatelegraph.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090118/NEWS01/301189908/-1/XML15;
http://wbztv.com/local/welfare.cases.massachusetts.2.895905.html; http://www.fpwa.org/binary-data/FPWA_BINARY/file/000/000/127-2.pdf
[14] http://www.azleg.gov/jlbc/mfh-dec-08.pdf
[15] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[16] http://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/st_WELFAREINCREASE0906_20090619.html
[17] http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/res/pdf/Paff/2008/PAFFSep08.pdf
[18] http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis_2009/ss/ss_anl09003002.aspx
[19] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[20] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[21] http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/ess/reports/caseload_circuit.xls
[22] http://www.palmbeachpost.com/state/content/state/epaper/2009/06/23/0623welfare.html
[23] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[24] http://www.massbudget.org/documentsearch/findDocument?doc_id=657&dse_id=751#footnote40
[25] http://dwss.nv.gov/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=550&Itemid=287

- TANF caseloads in **Ohio** have increased 14 percent since the latter half of 2007 and nearly 1 in 3 Ohioans seeking benefits are new to TANF and new to the system of social services.[26] Most recent data show that Ohio has a 10.8% increase from its 2008 levels.[27]
- In **Oregon**, the state's rising unemployment figures rose to 12.4 percent in May 2009 and requests for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) have increased 27.2 percent over last year.[28] Oregon has witnessed the highest increase in cases over 2008 levels in the nation.
- In **Washington**, over the past year, the number of people enrolled in TANF has risen by about 18.3[29] percent, while applications rose by 32 percent to more than 59,000 families in March. The number of actual TANF cases grew consistently faster than projected in the June forecast, reaching a 7.4% variance by October. The rapid caseload growth has been fueled mainly by rising numbers of new entrants. The November Total TANF projection for fiscal year 2009 is 6.9% higher than the June projection, which amounts to a projected caseload increase of 8.2% from fiscal year 2008. The Total TANF caseload is projected to rise by another 6.2% in fiscal year 2010, and 2.2% in fiscal year 2011.[30] The state has requested and expects to receive an additional $171 million from the federal government in the next biennium to help pay for the increase, and officials plan to request an additional $18.8 million in welfare stimulus money in 2010.[31]
- **South Carolina** is among the hardest hit states when it comes to unemployment. As of March 2009, South Carolina's unemployment rate hit 12.1% and its TANF caseload has risen to 23.1% over 2008 levels.[32]
- Fueled by a dramatic increase in child-only cases starting in July 2008, **Colorado** has registered a 16% increase in its TANF caseload.[33] In February 2009, *Colorado Works* informed its caseworkers and managers to "expect to see greater numbers of people seeking assistance, among them slightly more two-parent families."[34]

[26] http://www.dispatch.com/live/content/local_news/stories/2009/02/22/caseloads.ART_ART_02-22-09_A1_87D043V.html?sid=101
[27] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[28] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[29] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124562449457235503.html
[30] http://www.wa.gov/cfc/Web/TANF.pdf
[31] http://www.theolympian.com/stategovernment/story/841155.html
[32] http://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/st_WELFAREINCREASE0906_20090619.html
[33] http://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/st_WELFAREINCREASE0906_20090619.html
[34] http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheader=application%2Fpdf&blobheadername1=Content-Disposition&blobheadername2=MDT-Type&blobheadervalue1=inline%3B+filename%3D867%2F158%2F09+Feb+Issue+Brief.pdf&blobheadervalue2=abinary%3B+charset%3DUTF-8&blobkey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1235627526934&ssbinary=true

The following outlines promising strategies and activities that several States are instituted to respond to the increasing caseloads and growing levels of applicants.

Programs:

COMPASS (Pennsylvania)—COMPASS is a Web site that allows individuals and community based organizations access to screen for, apply for, and renew a broad range of social programs, including TANF, child care, medical assistance, food stamps, and energy assistance. COMPASS provides a self-screening questionnaire to assist applicants with applying for social services and an application to apply online for social services offered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. COMPASS can provide guidance to TANF participants about what services household members may be eligible to receive and allows for customers to apply for or renew benefits online.

TWIST (Texas)—TWIST is the information system that Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) developed as a centralized point of intake, case management, service delivery, and reporting. It enables workforce center staff to enter intake information for customers just once for multiple employment and training programs and to retrieve it statewide. TWIST also includes functionality allowing workforce center staff to query and retrieve information from the legacy systems - Employment Services (ES), Unemployment Insurance (UI), and the Integrated Database Network (IDBN) including Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and SSI (Supplemental Security Income). TWIST provides functionality such as but not limited to: intake, assessment, service tracking, legacy interface, planning, reporting, service planning, outreach, post program detail tracking, counseling notes, and eligibility for JTPA Dislocated Worker programs, WIA, Welfare to Work, Food Stamps Employment and Training program, TANF, and One-Stop Career Services.

Office of Children, Adults and Families (CAF), Department of Human Services (Oregon) — CAF has streamlined intake services for food stamps and other benefits to provide same-day service. To better serve the new clients, CAF is shifting staff to the overwhelmed offices and using federal bonus money to hire 60 additional staff to help cover the rising need. CAF will roll out an improved intake process for SNAP and other benefits designed to provide same-day service, instead of wait times of a week or more for intake appointments. The streamlined process was developed and successfully tested as part of the DHS Transformation Initiative, employing the proven "lean" methodology used by private industry and government.

Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS) (Colorado)—CBMS is the computer system that determines an applicant's eligibility for public assistance (welfare programs) based upon the data provided by the applicant.   CBMS is an automated system that improves the efficiency and effectiveness of business processes through innovative technology. It ensures clients are served quickly without multiple visits, redundant steps, or duplicative data collection. It is an innovative case management program that reduces paperwork and increases case worker attention to family needs, while sharing information across multiple programs/services without manual or paper processes, thereby reducing confusion.