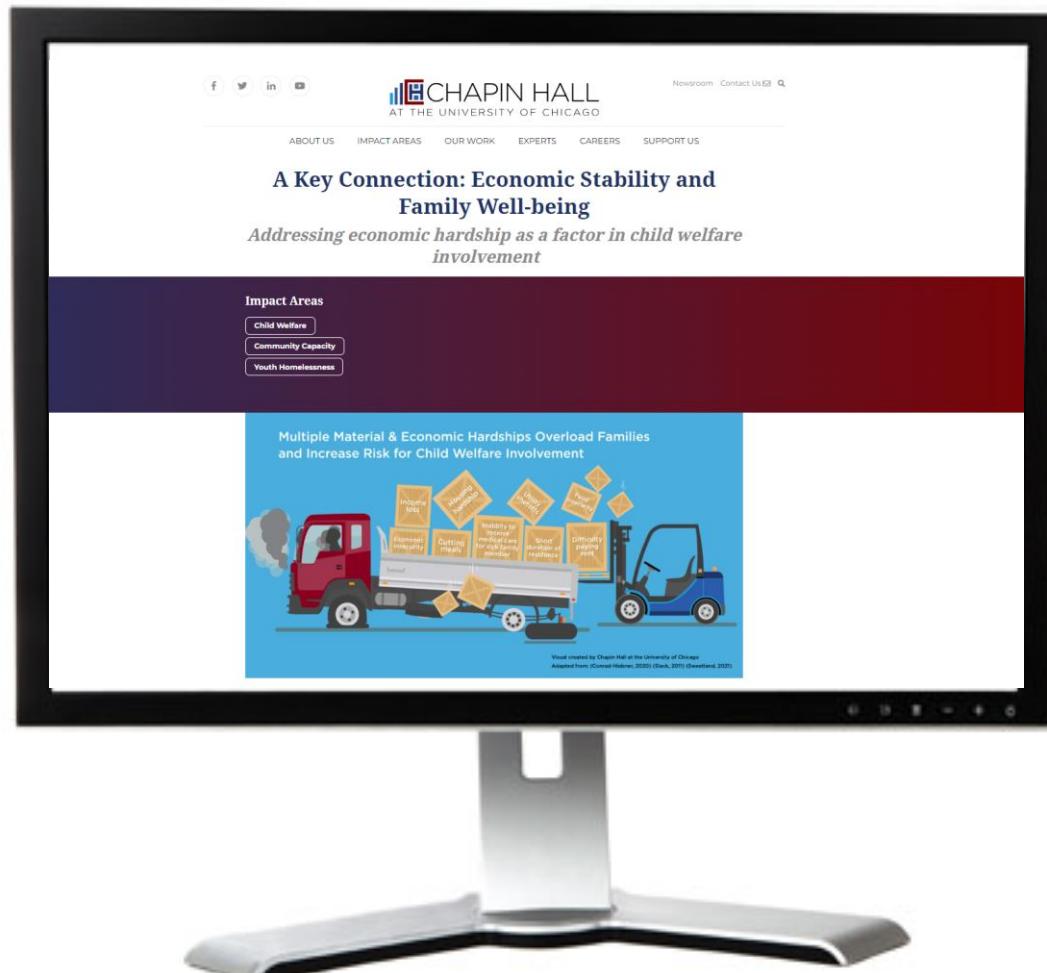


# Child and Family Well-being System: TANF & Child Welfare Alignment as a Key Prevention Strategy

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# Chapin Hall Resources

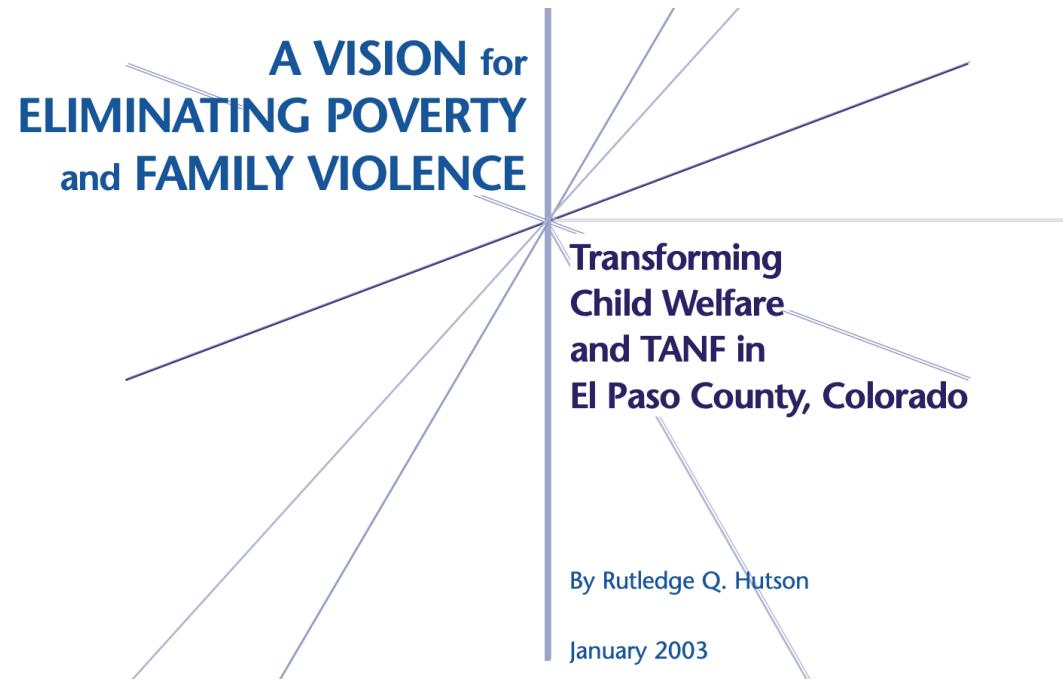


[Chapinhall.org/ecsproject](https://chapinhall.org/ecsproject)

(Weiner, Anderson & Thomas, 2021)  
(Anderson, Grewal-Kök, Cusick, Weiner & Thomas, 2021)

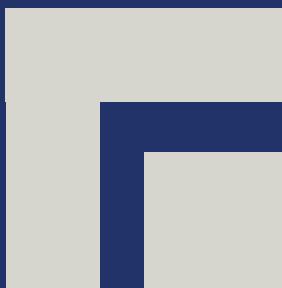
# "Bold New Vision" from **2003**...and today, we'll expand this vision with evidence & policy

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The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program...considers itself a child abuse and neglect prevention program, while the child welfare program considers itself an anti-poverty program.

# Historical Context



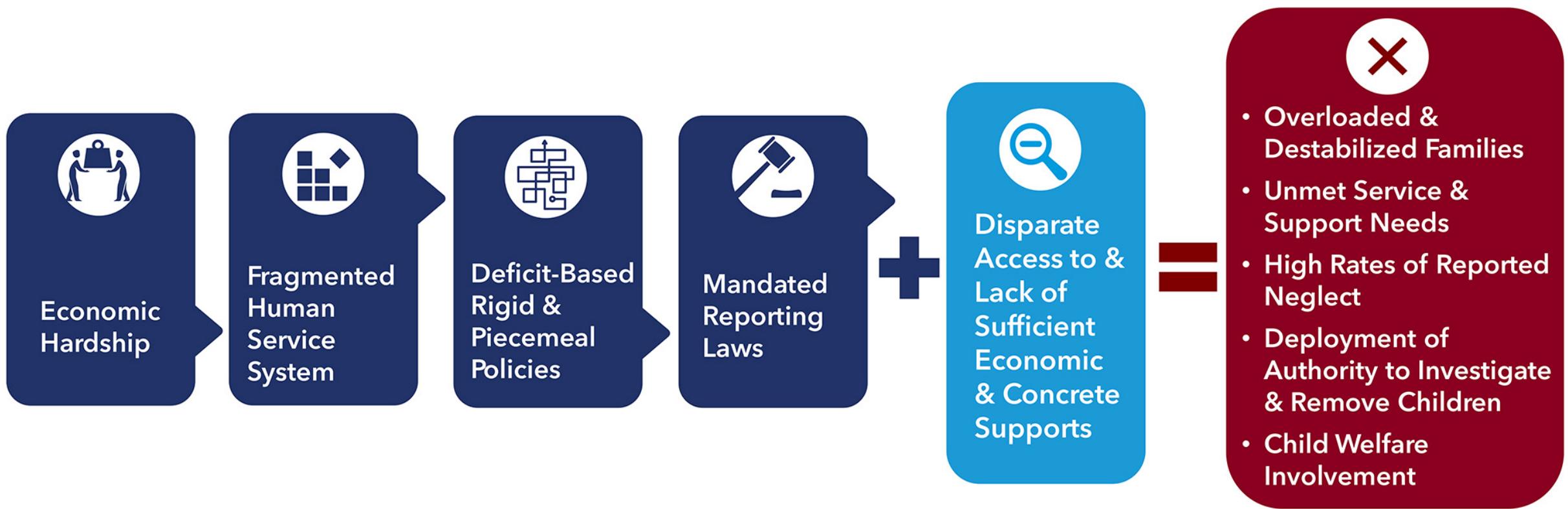
# Child Welfare's Historic Structure

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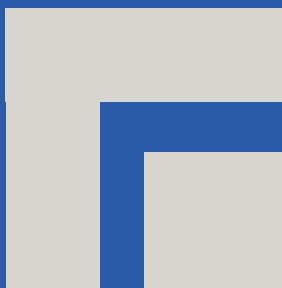
- Child welfare has been **reactive**—responding to allegations of maltreatment with investigations & foster care
- From the onset of child and family services, **policymakers repeatedly separated programs designed to address poverty from programs designed to protect children**
- **Prevention** services receive less consistent funding
- Economic & concrete support policies and programs are administered as if **unrelated to child welfare**
- **Root causes** of maltreatment have not been consistently addressed, perpetuating family separation, structural racism & intergenerational trauma

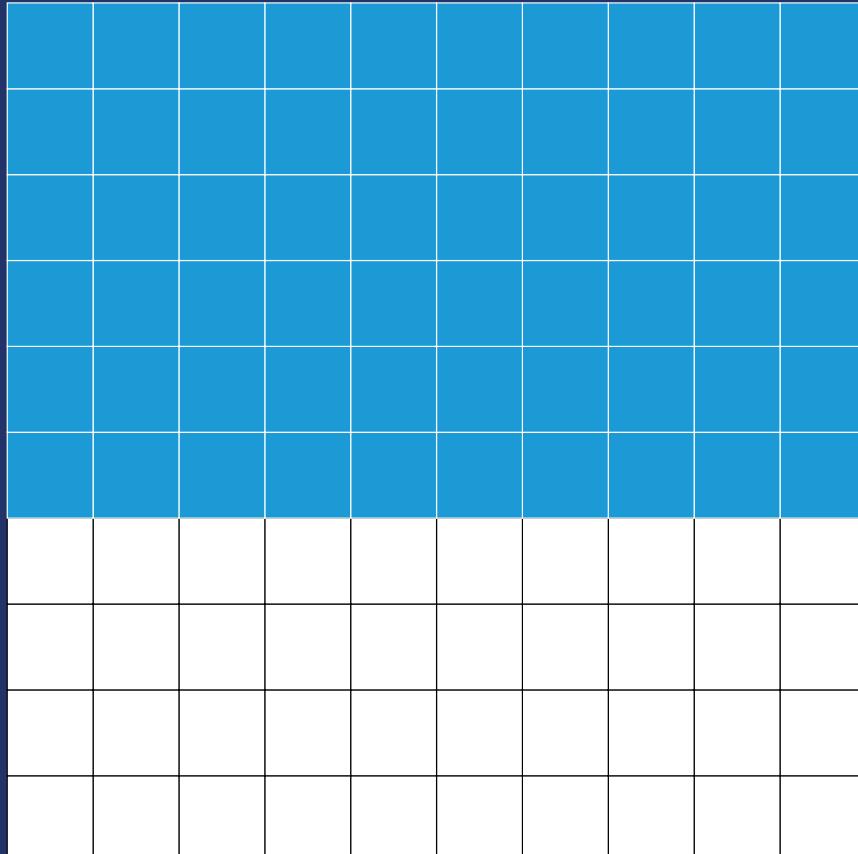


# Impact of Historical Policy Choices



# Overview of Family Economic Insecurity, Income & Child Welfare Involvement





**60%+**

of substantiated CPS responses nationally involve **neglect only**

...and provision of economic & concrete supports is associated with decreased risk for both neglect and physical abuse

nearly **85%**  
of families investigated by  
child protective services  
have incomes below 200%  
of the federal poverty line

*(\$49,720 for a family of 3 in 2023)*

# Material Hardship Increases Risk for Child Welfare Involvement: **Both Neglect & Abuse**

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If low-income families experience **at least one** material hardship

- **~3x higher likelihood of neglect investigation**
- **~4x higher likelihood physical abuse investigation**

If low-income families experience **multiple types** of material hardship  
*(after experiencing no hardships)*

- **~4x higher likelihood of CPS investigation**
- **~7x higher likelihood physical abuse investigation**

(Yang, 2015)

*\*Dimensions of material hardship in this study included: food, housing, utilities & medical hardship*

# The Intersection of Family Economic Insecurity & Child Welfare Involvement

Most reliable **economic predictors of child welfare involvement**



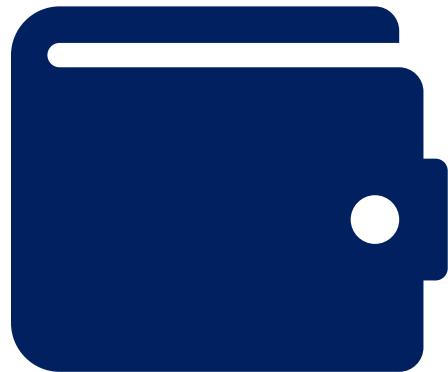
Strongest predictors of investigated neglect reports



# Negative Earnings Shocks Are Associated with Increased Risk for Subsequent Child Welfare Involvement

(slide 1 of 2)

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For low-income families with recently closed CPS investigations:

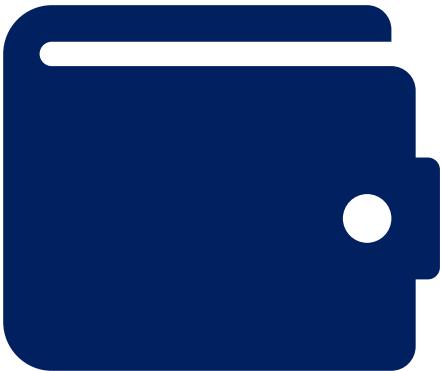
- Experiencing a **negative earnings shock** (*quarterly reduction in earnings of 30% or more*):
  - Increases risk of subsequent CPS investigation by 18%
  - Increases risk of physical abuse investigation by 26%

About **10% of low-income adults with children** have experienced a financial shock resulting in a 50% income drop over one year

# But the Association Diminishes When Negative Earnings Shocks Are Offset by Public Benefits (slide 2 of 2)

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For low-income families with recently closed CPS investigations:



- **Accessing sufficient public benefits** when negative earnings shocks occur effectively buffers against the risk of child welfare involvement
  - Buffer is particularly strong for families with young children (ages 0–4), who are associated with a:
    - **12% decrease** in risk for CPS involvement
    - **50% decrease** in risk for physical abuse investigation

# Evidence of Causal Effect of Income on Risk for Child Welfare Involvement

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Mothers who participate in TANF and are eligible to receive full child support for their children (and child support is disregarded in determining welfare benefits) are **10% less likely to have a child subject to a screened-in maltreatment report**

*(compared to mothers who are eligible to receive only partial child support payments)*

# Income Reductions Also Associated with Longer Time to Reunify

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Children in foster care take longer to reunify with their families when:

- Their families **lose a significant amount of cash assistance** post placement

*Percentage of children remaining in foster care after a year whose mothers lost a significant amount of income from cash assistance post placement is more than double that of children whose mothers did not lose income from cash assistance post placement (87% vs. 41%)*

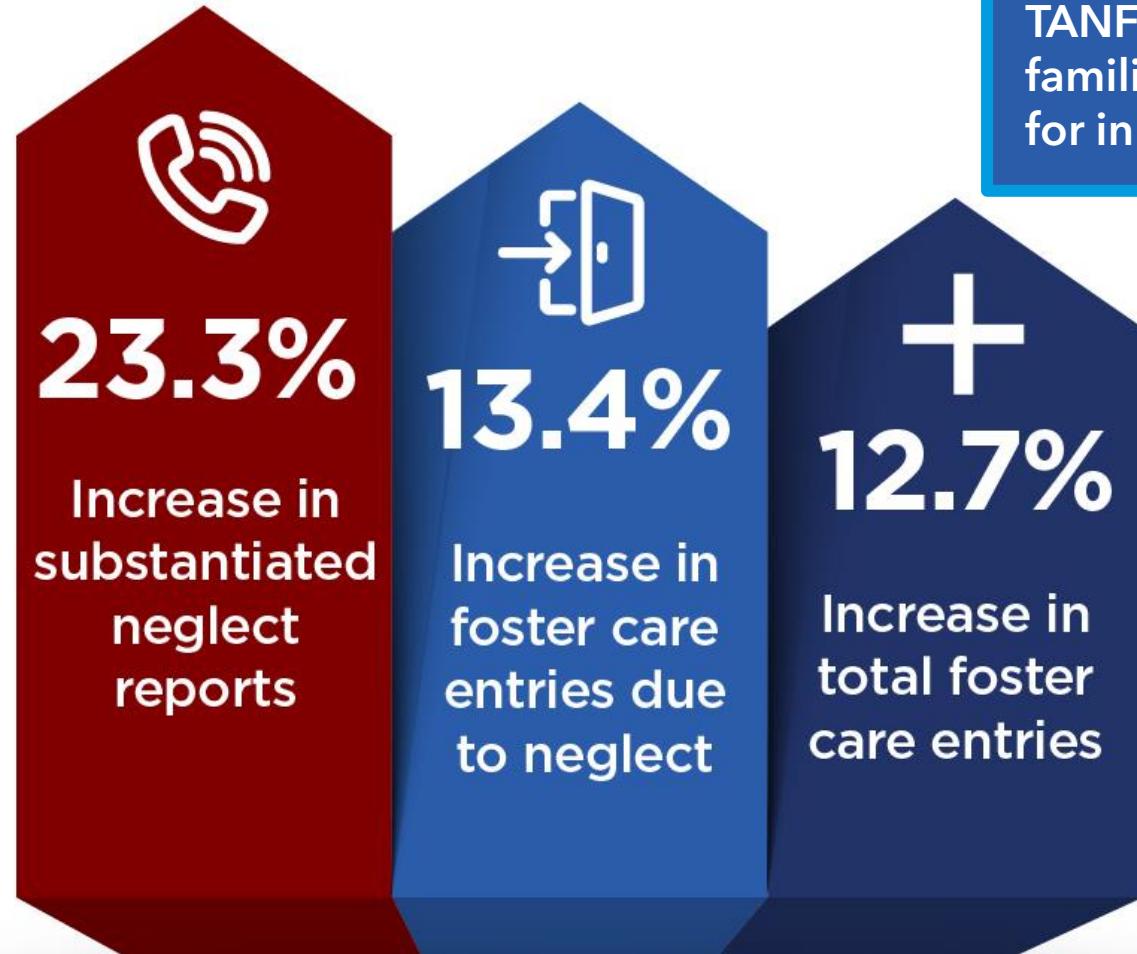


# Evidence:

What does the evidence suggest happens  
when access to TANF is reduced?

# Lack of Access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

States that imposed total benefit loss as the most severe sanction for not meeting TANF work requirements:



(Ginther, 2017)

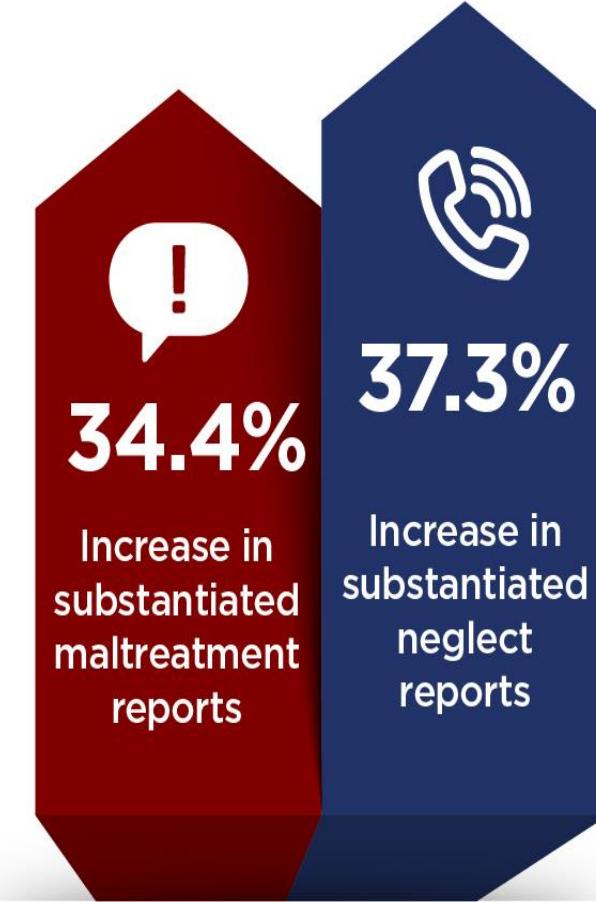
(Increases observed from 2004 to 2015)

**Reminder:** The first statutory goal of TANF is to provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or with relatives

In FY 2021, up to **\$6.2 billion** in federal TANF funds were being held in reserve by states (ranging from \$0 to \$1.2 billion per state)

# Lack of Access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

**States that implemented TANF time limits of less than 5 years:**



(Ginther, 2017)

(Increases observed from 2004 to 2015)

# Lack of Access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Each additional state policy that restricts access to TANF is associated with:

50

Additional children with **substantiated neglect** reports

22

Additional children **entering foster care due to abuse**

21

Additional children **entering foster care due to neglect**

(all columns are per 100,000 children)

**TANF policy choices reviewed in this study included:**

- Time limits of less than 60 months
- Severe sanctions for not meeting work requirements
- Work requirements for mothers with children < 12 months
- Suspicion-based drug testing of applicants

(Ginther, 2022; update of 2017 study)

(Increases observed from 2004 to 2016)

# Lack of Access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

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State policies that limit access to TANF benefits:



- Reducing the maximum allowable cash benefit amount
- Implementing stricter time limits on receipt of benefits
- Lower TANF-to-Poverty Ratio (TPR)\* (*indicating less access to TANF benefits*)

are associated with **increases in mothers' self-reports of physical child maltreatment**

*(from 2001 to 2010)*

(Spencer, 2021)

\*TPR = number of families with children who receive TANF for every 100 families with children who are living in poverty

# Reduced TANF Cash Benefits

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From 1985 to 2000:



- Reductions in AFDC/TANF cash benefit levels were **a main predictor** of the dramatic growth in state-level foster care caseloads during this period
- 10% reduction in the average monthly AFDC/TANF cash benefit amount for a family of 3 was associated with a **2.3% increase in the foster care caseload rate**

# Evidence:

What does the evidence suggest happens when access to TANF is increased?

# Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

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A 10% increase in state public benefit levels (*AFDC/TANF + the value of food stamps*) for a family of four is predicted to **reduce foster care placements by 8%**

# Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

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Easing TANF restrictions is associated with:

- **Fewer children with substantiated neglect**
- **Fewer children placed into foster care**
  - An estimated **29,112 fewer children would have entered foster care nationally** from 2004 to 2016 if states had eased TANF restrictions to increase access for families

**TANF policy choices reviewed in this study included:**

- Time limits of less than 60 months
- Severe sanctions for not meeting work requirements
- Work requirements for mothers with children < 12 months
- Suspicion-based drug testing of applicants

# Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

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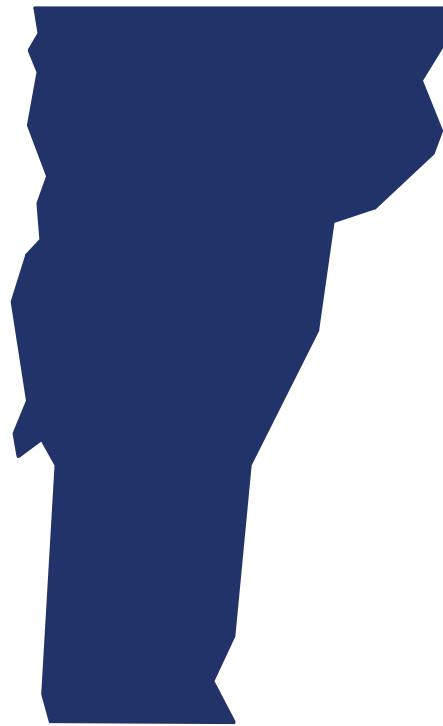


State policies that increase access to TANF are associated with **reductions in maternal self-reported physical child maltreatment**

- A \$100 increase in TANF cash benefits is associated with reductions in maternal self-reported physical child maltreatment

# Economic Diversion System: *Vermont*

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- Vermont has *highest* rate of child maltreatment referrals in the nation, but *lowest* rate of screened-in neglect cases (1.5%)

Vermont has created an **“economic firewall”** through:

- **Interagency collaboration & service coordination:**  
Co-location of CPS with economic services & early child development divisions
- Providing all CPS district directors with direct access to **family preservation flexible funds** to prevent removal
- **Multidimensional diversion system** that refers families to:
  - ✓ Economic support services (TANF)
  - ✓ Family resource centers
  - ✓ Differential response systems

(DeGuerre, 2021)

(Feely, 2020)

([Child Maltreatment 2019](#))

Full reference list is available [here](#).

Main slide deck available at:  
[Chapinhall.org/ecsproject](http://Chapinhall.org/ecsproject)



# Contact

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