

Kentucky Shortchanged on Child Poverty Funding, New Analysis Shows

Report Recommends Fixes for Block Grant Flaw

For Immediate Release: December 8, 2011

Contact: Ed Walz, First Focus Campaign for Children, 202-657-0685
Whitney Neal, Kentucky Youth Advocates, 502-895-8167 ext. 121



Washington – First Focus and Kentucky Youth Advocates released a [new report](#) today, showing that funding to help Kentucky manage the growing problem of child poverty lags behind that of other states like Ohio, Illinois, and West Virginia. It also recommends concrete actions Kentucky’s Congressional delegation can take right now to give Kentucky’s leaders the resources they need to meet children’s needs.

The report, TANF Supplemental Grants: Reforming and Restoring Support for Children Who Need it the Most, was authored by First Focus President Bruce Lesley and Senior Director, Family Economics, Megan Curran. It examines federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant funding per child in poverty. That is a critical measure, as TANF helps states meet critical needs for families with children in or near poverty, like child support enforcement funding, resources to make child care more affordable, job training to help parents hit by job losses find new careers and help young adults begin theirs, and resources to prevent child abuse and neglect and meet the needs of abuse and neglect victims.

“From child care to child abuse prevention, TANF is a lifeline for Kentucky families fighting hard to stay afloat. Congress should ensure that their lifeline is just as strong as those available to families in Massachusetts, California or Alaska,” said First Focus President Bruce Lesley.

The First Focus analysis shows that, because the 1996 welfare law that created TANF failed to index state funding levels to inflation and changes in child poverty rates (a typical shortcoming of block grants), states like Kentucky have been under-funded as inflation has eroded their TANF funding’s purchasing power and as child poverty rates have increased during tough economic times. Kentucky currently receives \$720 per child in poverty while, Illinois receives \$998, West Virginia \$1,209, and Ohio \$1,261. Across the nation, other states receive more assistance than Kentucky: Massachusetts receives \$2,444, and Alaska \$2,863.

The report also shows that Congress has attempted to mitigate this disparity through a TANF Supplemental Grants initiative. Those grants only reduced the shortfall and did not level the playing field. Furthermore, the original TANF Supplemental Grants initiative did not include Kentucky, South Carolina, and several other high-needs states. To compound the problem, TANF Supplemental Grants will be discontinued for all states unless Congress acts to restore them. While doing so would not solve the problem, allowing TANF Supplemental Grants to expire widens the funding gap for under-funded states.

“Moving across the Ohio River shouldn’t mean putting your children’s future at risk. We are counting on Congressman Geoff Davis, who chairs the U.S. House committee responsible for TANF, to deliver for Kentucky’s children on this issue,” said Terry Brooks, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates.

First Focus recommends three actions Congress can take to level the playing field for Kentucky and other under-funded states:

1. Adopt the TANF Supplemental Grants Extension Act (H.R. 2277) and broaden it to make Kentucky and other under-funded states eligible for Supplemental Grants;
2. Tie TANF funding to inflation and need, so funding adjusts with child population and economic changes;
3. Designate reducing child poverty an official purpose of federal TANF funding to states, ensuring that funds continue to meet kids’ needs during tough state budget debates

“Congress shouldn’t go home this year until they’ve restored the TANF Supplemental Grants, and next year they should fix the problem once and for all by ensuring that every state has a strong focus on lifting kids out of poverty and the resources they need to do so,” said Lesley.

###

The First Focus Campaign for Children is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization affiliated with First Focus, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization. The Campaign for Children advocates directly for legislative change in Congress to ensure children and families are a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. For more information, visit www.ffcampaignforchildren.org.

[Kentucky Youth Advocates](#) is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.