

**By fax: (717) 772-8284**

September 18, 2020

Tom Wolf, Governor  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

**Re: Now is the time for Pennsylvania to help those most in need during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Dear Governor Wolf:

We are a group of advocacy and community organizations who work directly with low-income Pennsylvanians across the state. We applaud your leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic and the many steps your administration has taken to address the effects of the current public health crisis. We especially appreciated your Emergency Assistance Program that offered cash assistance between May and July to needy families affected by the pandemic.

**Unfortunately, pandemic relief has not reached all Pennsylvanians. Families living in deep poverty, who have largely been left out of state and federal assistance thus far, urgently need access to COVID relief.** As you have recognized, the poorest families have not received the SNAP emergency allotments that less poor families have received until now, and have not received school meals over the summer. They will not receive P-EBT replacement benefits this school year, and many have faced extra obstacles in claiming federal economic impact payments. Many immigrant families, including those with citizen children, were barred altogether from receiving those economic impact payments or pandemic unemployment benefits.

**We request that you take immediate action to ensure that families living in deep poverty also receive pandemic relief as a part of the state's response.**

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is the state program that provides critical income support to families with children living in deep poverty. This support is often the only income these families receive, and it is not nearly enough. Pennsylvania has not increased TANF grant amounts in 30 years, leaving TANF families to survive on income less than 25% of the federal poverty level. A family of three receives roughly \$400 per month in income. Even without the current public health crisis, it is very difficult for families receiving TANF benefits to meet their basic needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has only made it worse. Our clients tell us how they have had trouble feeding their children as prices have risen and former sources of free meals have become unavailable, and it has become more difficult for these parents to find work

Three quarters of TANF recipients in Pennsylvania are children. The majority are Black. This program's participants have been left behind and denied basic help that they desperately

need due to racist stigma attached to Black families who have the greatest need. With children home from school and daycare, these families faced increased food and utility bills in addition to the increased costs to obtain food and basic necessities resulting from the pandemic. This means that children are going hungry and many families are facing eviction.

You have the opportunity right now to help those who need it the most. Pennsylvania should act now to provide additional assistance to Pennsylvanians living in deep poverty. Many states have already provided additional assistance to TANF families during the pandemic, including West Virginia, Colorado, North Carolina, and Illinois. It is not too late for Pennsylvania to act and get help to those Pennsylvanians who need it most. These families urgently need access to relief as the pandemic stretches on.

**We request you take immediate action to ensure equity in Pennsylvania's response to the pandemic and issue support to families living in deep poverty.** We urge you to provide this critical assistance by:

- Issuing COVID special allowances to TANF families for essential items that have been difficult and expensive to obtain, such as diapers and food;
- Enhancing the Emergency Shelter Allowance to assist families who have not qualified for other pandemic rent relief; and
- Reinstating the Emergency Assistance Program to provide one-time COVID relief grants for low-income families not receiving TANF.

We would willingly work with the Department of Human Services to determine how best to get this help to families as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for your prompt consideration of this request. We request that one of your staff members schedule a call with key advocates as soon as possible to discuss this further. Please reach out to Louise Hayes at Community Legal Services, (215) 227-4734, [LHayes@clsphila.org](mailto:LHayes@clsphila.org). Louise will relay any information to the larger advocacy community.

Sincerely,

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