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In 1996 President Bill Clinton signed into law the "Personal Responsibilities and Work Opportunities Act," which was a welfare reform bill. As part of the act, Federal money is given to states as "block grants" via "Temporary Assistance to Needy Families ("TANF"). In 2001 Vermont used its block grant to implement Reach Up.¹ The purpose of Reach Up is to help families with children and pregnant women living beneath the federal poverty line through a number of services, such as work support, monthly income for basic necessities, and health insurance provisions.

Adults receiving Reach Up benefits are required to spend a certain number of hours a week either working or engaging in activities related to searching for a job.² Reach Up participants meet with a case manager to create a Family Development Plan in order to detail the steps to achieving goals, such as job placement and self-sufficiency.³ A family of 3 that receives Reach Up benefits will be granted an average of \$640 per month.⁴ Families living in counties with higher costs of living, such as Chittenden County, will receive more

offer, Reach First can help provide assistance in the meantime.⁶ Reach Ahead, which was created in 2009, is designed to help families' transition from Reach Up, or from another program in Vermont, the Post-Secondary Education Program, to working. Reach Ahead provides financial assistance, childcare subsidies, and work support for up to 12 months.

recipient based on disability.¹⁶ This adult would meet the federal standard of being “unable to perform substantial gainful activity in the economy.”¹⁷ SSI is paid only to couples and individuals, with no additional benefits if they have children. States use TANF funds to make up the difference and provide benefits and money to the children of SSI parents. In cases where the family is a “child-only” family, in which the parent is in the home but is not an eligible SSI recipient, there tends to be older children in the family. In FY2013, 30.5% of TANF child-only families that were headed by an SSI receiving parent had a teenager as their youngest child.

income. Prior to the cuts, the SSI beneficiaries were not counted in Reach Up's calculation of monthly benefits. This means that if one member of a four-person household received SSI, then Reach Up had provided benefits as if it were a three-person household. The SSI recipient families have more income available to them than other families, but the fact that these families contain a disabled member is a considerable factor as well.

In July 2015, Vermont Legal Aid filed a lawsuit challenging the cuts. In November, the lawsuit was thrown out.²⁶ Judge William K. Sessions III found that the new law reducing public assistance to families with disabled parents accepting SSI is constitutional and does not violate federal law. In his closing statement Judge Sessions III agreed that "the law at issue in this case targets one of the most vulnerable populations in Vermont: disabled adults raising children in poverty. In an effort to achieve budgetary saving the Legislature has voted to decrease public aid to those families, resulting in what can only be further hardship for parents as they struggle to provide food and shelter for their children."²⁷

According to the TANF data, the recipients for Reach Up have been predominately female, historically averaging around 80%. Thus, cutting Reach Up benefits significantly affects women. The Reach Up program is a bridge to assist people and families out of poverty since 2001. It stands to reason that reduced benefits will make it more difficult for Reach Up recipients to overcome the problems that impair their ability to provide for their families. Some of the top problems facing Reach Up members are: transportation, finances, emotional health, and employment.²⁸

Source: Ken Schatz, "Report to The Vermont Legislature- Evaluation of Reach Up,"