



# **State Innovations and Opportunities with SNAP & TANF to Build Family Economic Security and Mobility**

April 27, 2023

Hosted by NCSL's Health and Human Services Committee

# Objectives

To review new longitudinal research addressing the intent and efficacy of SNAP and TANF programs in reducing poverty



To understand how states are leveraging federal flexibilities in their administration of SNAP and TANF



To brainstorm and make recommendations in consideration of NCSL's federal advocacy policies





Presentation



Q&A



Small group discussion



Closing and resources

# Format

# Dana Thomson

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Child Trends promotes the well-being of all children and youth through applied research that informs public policies, builds the evidence base for what works, and mines data to identify young people who are overlooked or ill served by public systems.





# State Innovations and Opportunities on SNAP & TANF to Build Family Economic Security and Mobility

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Senior Research Scientist

Child Trends.



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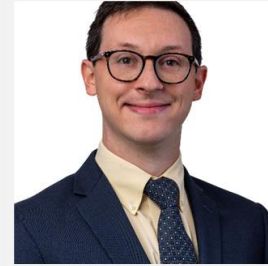
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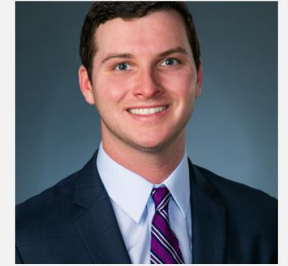
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# Overview

- For SNAP and TANF, in turn:
  - Research highlights on program impacts and what works
  - Federal rules and state flexibilities
    - Eligibility
    - Reach
    - Benefits
- Looking forward: Where do we go from here?
  - Opportunities for states & case studies
  - Additional federal supports that could help states innovate

SNAP



# SNAP is the nation's largest nutrition assistance program

**18 million**

Children are helped by SNAP each month

**82%**

Of eligible individuals receive SNAP benefits

**\$418**

Is the average monthly SNAP benefit per family

# SNAP benefits individuals & society



SNAP reduces food insecurity



Receipt of SNAP is linked with better maternal health, higher birthweights, & better child health



Receipt of SNAP is linked with improvements in children's academic skills



Receipt of SNAP during childhood is linked with better health and greater earnings in adulthood

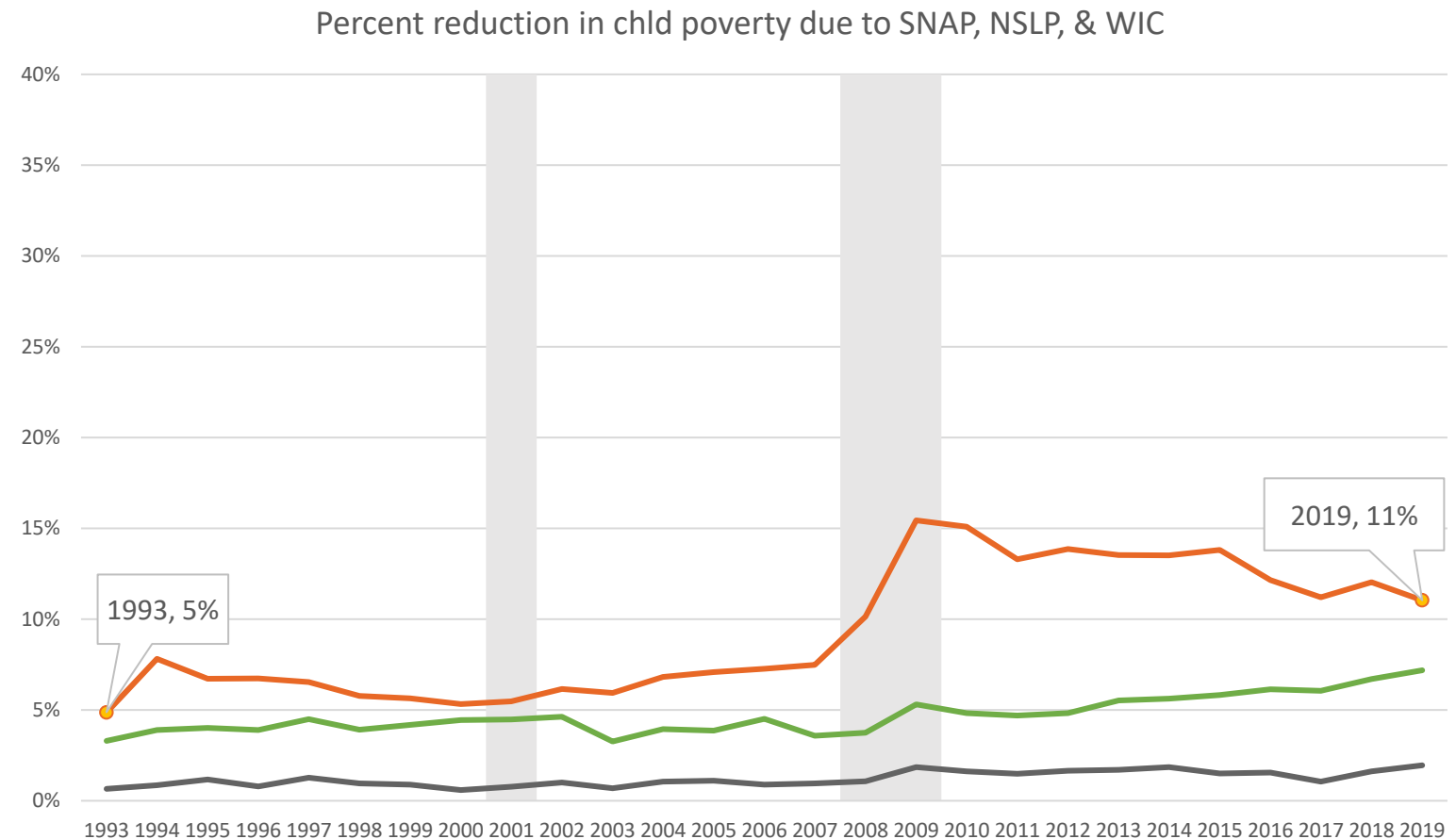


SNAP serves as a stabilizer for the economy

# SNAP reduces child poverty

SNAP lifted **1 million children** out of poverty in 2019.

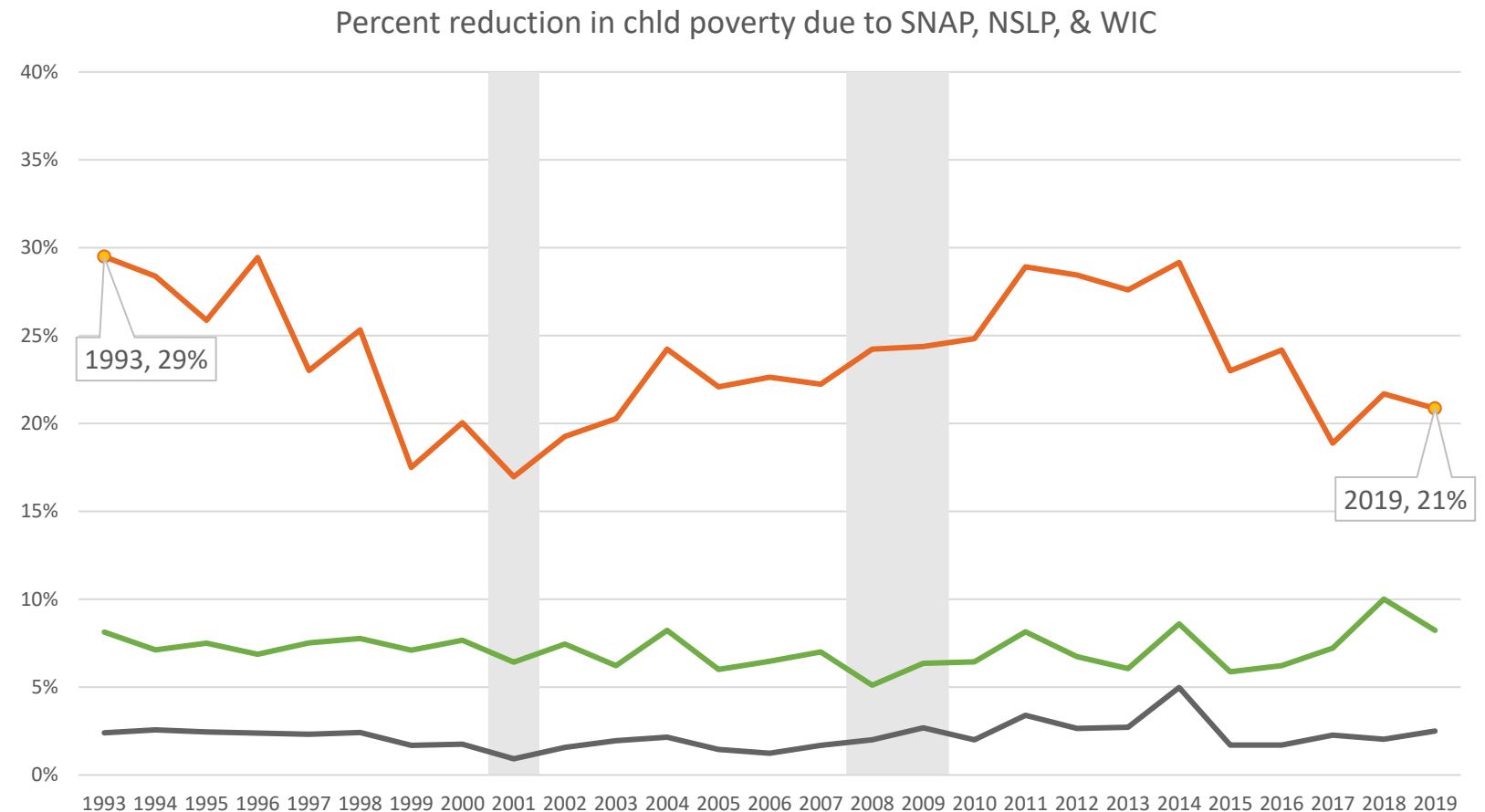
SNAP reduced child poverty by **11%**.



# SNAP reduces child *deep* poverty

SNAP lifted  
**600,000 children**  
out of *deep*  
poverty in 2019.

SNAP reduced  
child *deep*  
poverty by **21%**.



# SNAP research highlights: What is working?

- Uniform eligibility rules make benefits available to children in almost all families experiencing poverty or near-poverty
- The funding structure is responsive to changing economic conditions
- The benefit structure targets assistance to families with the fewest resources
- Efforts to make SNAP easier to access and use have been broadly successful
- SNAP benefits from having a clear goal: reducing hunger and food insecurity

# SNAP research highlights: Potential challenges?

- Benefit levels are insufficient to cover costs of a healthy diet; food consumption falls throughout the month
- SNAP benefits have less purchasing power in higher-cost areas and increases tied to inflation are lagged
- There is a need for more streamlined administrative and application processes with other social service programs
- Families participating in SNAP often face multiple barriers to self-sufficiency and may struggle to meet SNAP's work and participation requirements



# SNAP: Federal rules

*Individuals are categorically eligible if all members of the household receive TANF cash assistance or SSI*



Gross monthly household income < 130% of the poverty line



Net monthly income (after allowable deductions)  $\leq$  100% of the poverty line



Assets (not including home) < specified threshold (~\$2,750 for households without an older or disabled member)



Must meet work requirements unless a child, pregnant woman, senior, or disabled (otherwise limited to 3 months of SNAP every 3 years)



For non-disabled adults, must be a citizen or LPR who has lived in the US for 5+ years; must not have been convicted of a drug felony

# SNAP: State flexibilities

## Eligibility

- Gross income eligibility limit
- Income deductions
- Asset tests
- Eligibility for those convicted of a drug felony
- Work requirements
- Broad-based categorical eligibility

## Enrollment & Reach

- Simplifying application & verification procedures
- Common application for multiple programs
- Recertification timelines and requirements
- Information and application instructions available in multiple languages
- Outreach & messaging

## Benefits

- Online purchases
- Restaurant meals for homeless, elderly, or disabled
- Incentives for specific types of food (e.g., locally grown produce)

# SNAP: Additional flexibilities during COVID

## Eligibility

- Temporary student exemptions
- Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs) time limit suspension

## Enrollment & Reach

- Certification period extensions
- Reporting requirement adjustments
- Recertification procedures
- Waivers for initial and recertification interview requirements

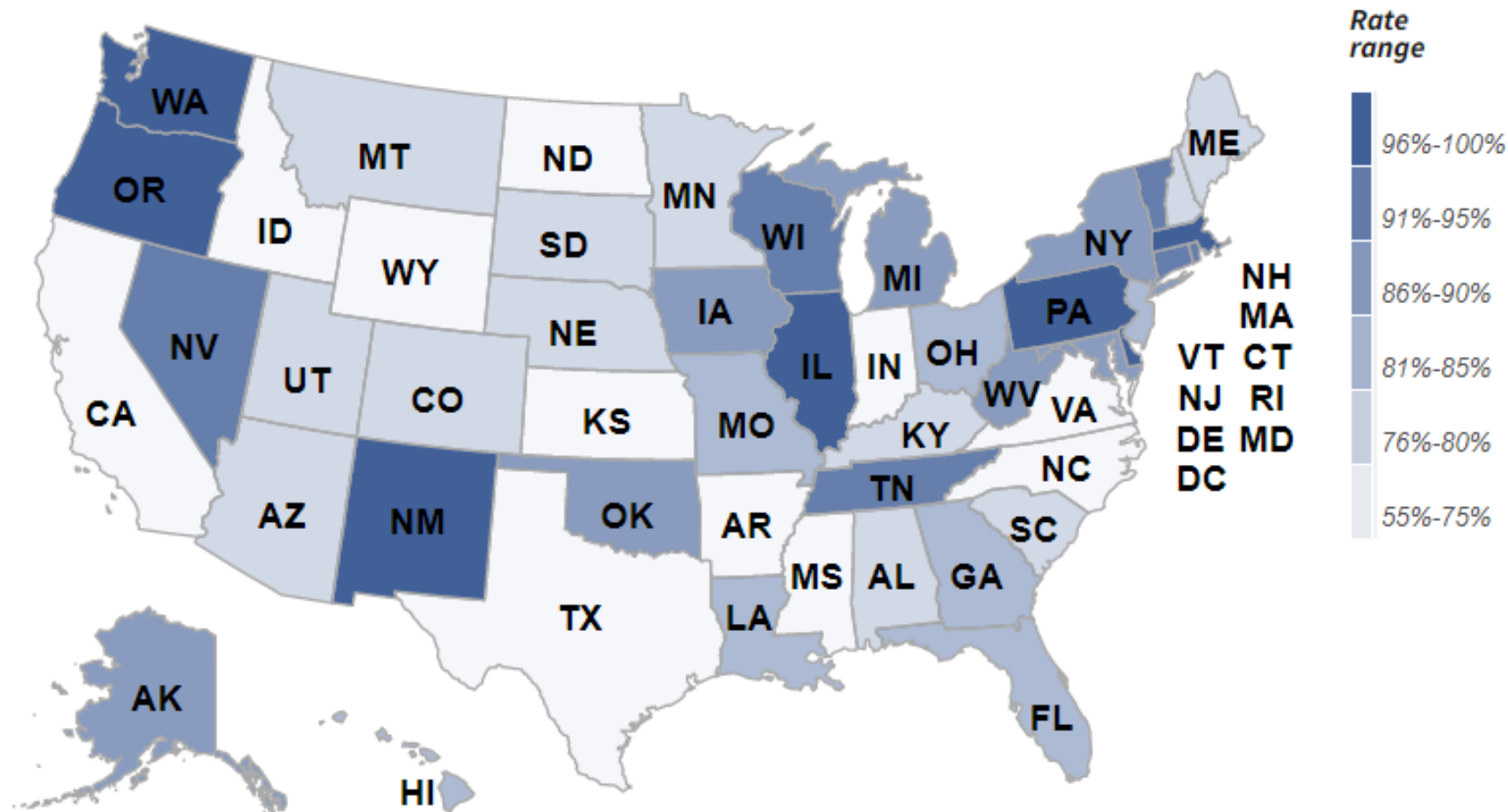
## Benefits

- Emergency allotments
- Replace lost school meals through pandemic EBT
- Expanded online purchases

There is considerable variation in state SNAP participation rates among those eligible

## SNAP Participation Rates by State, All Eligible People

National Rate: 82%



TANF

# TANF is the nation's primary cash assistance program

**1.4 million**

Children are helped by TANF

**21%**

Of families in poverty receive  
TANF benefits

**\$517**

Is the average monthly TANF  
benefit per family



# Cash assistance benefits individuals & society



Cash assistance helps families flexibly meet their basic needs



Increases in income from cash transfers are linked with better maternal health, higher birthweights, & better child health



Increase in income from cash transfers are linked with improvements in children's academic skills and educational attainment



Increases in income from cash transfers are linked with reduced involvement with child welfare and juvenile justice systems



Increases in income from cash transfers are linked with better health and greater earnings in adulthood

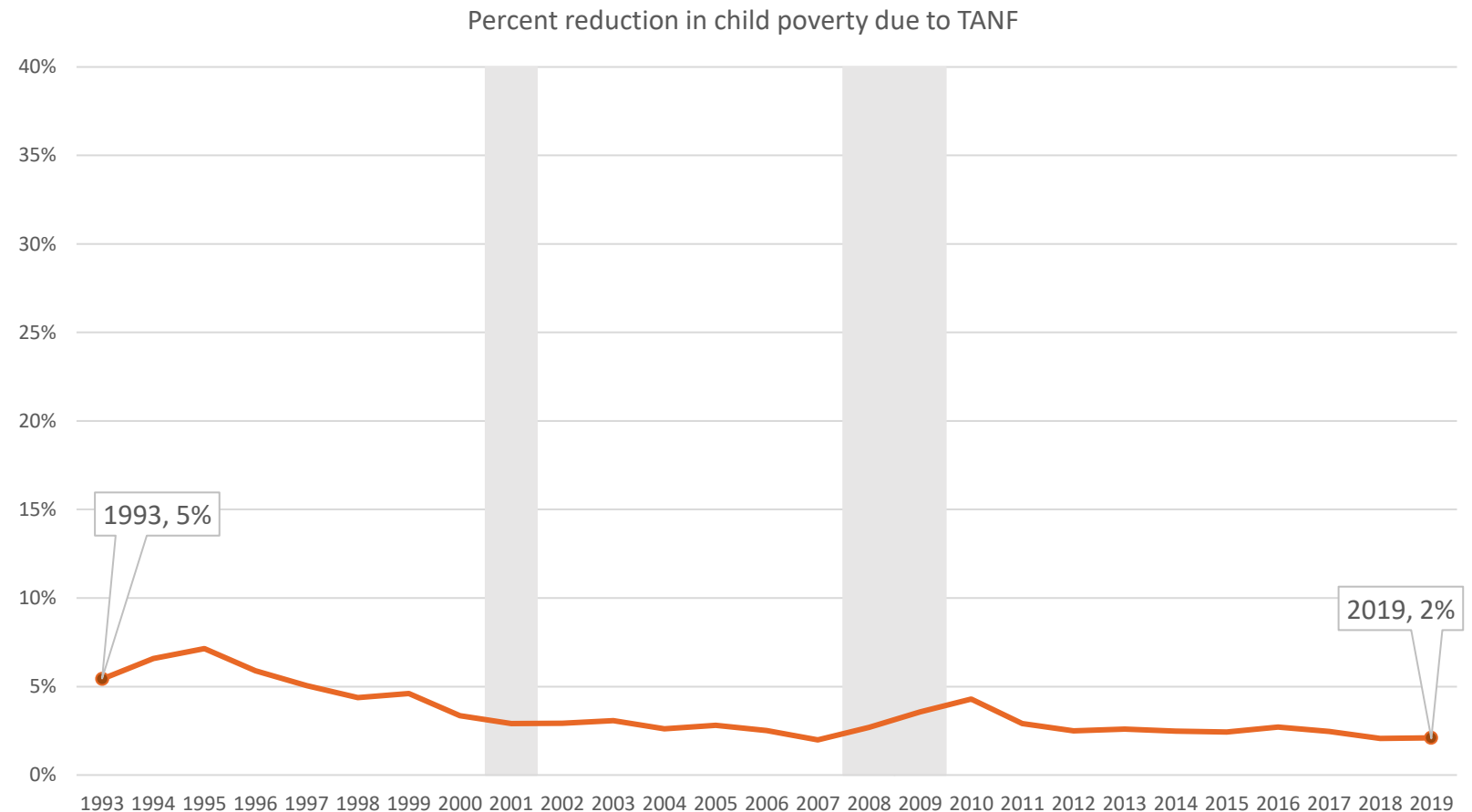


The value to society that flows from these impacts is equal to over 8 times the cost

# TANF has a much smaller role in reducing child poverty

TANF lifted  
**200,000 children**  
out of poverty in  
2019.

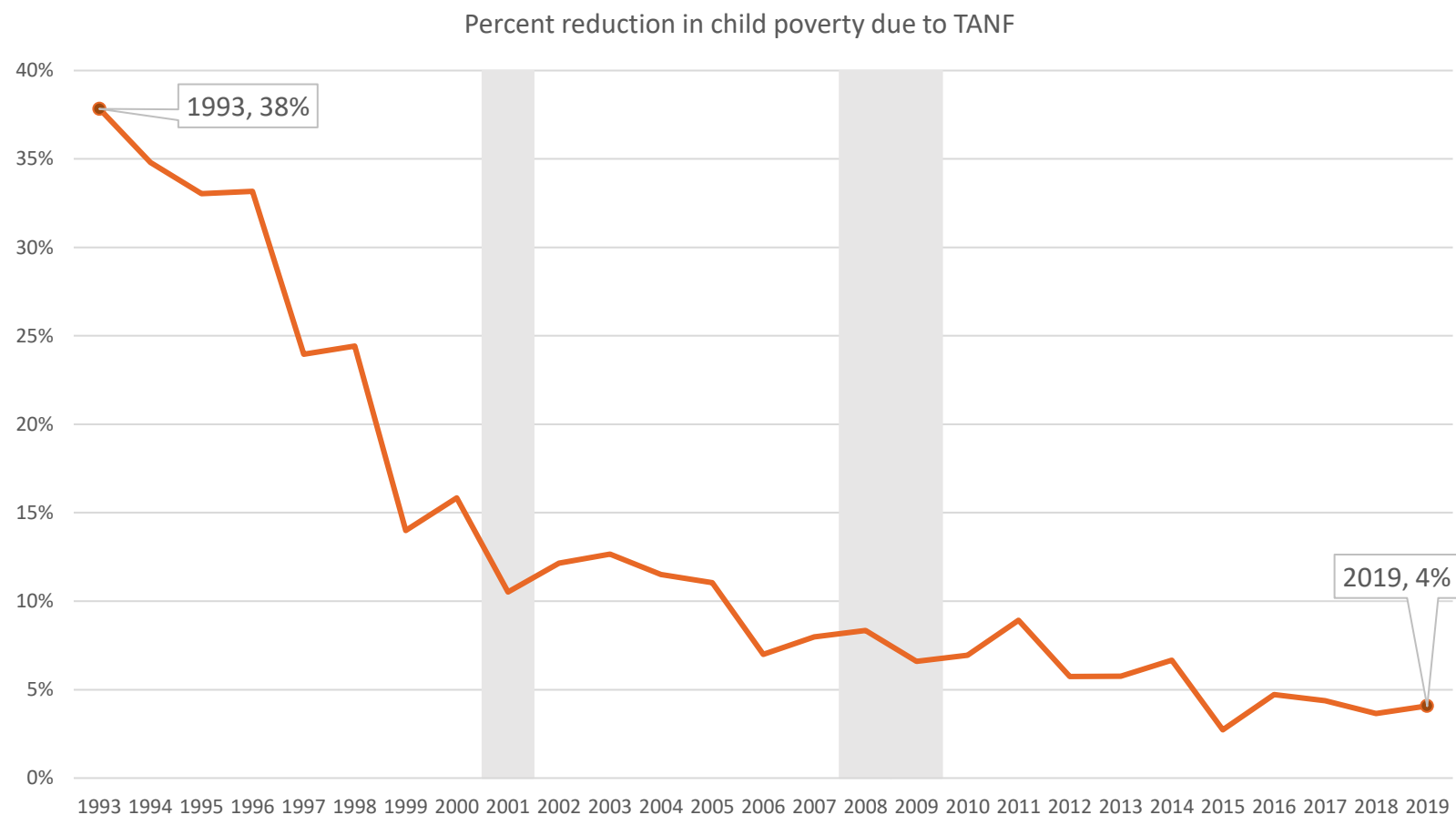
TANF reduced  
child poverty by  
**2%.**



# TANF's role in reducing child *deep* poverty has substantially declined

TANF lifted  
**100,000 children**  
out of *deep*  
poverty in 2019.

TANF reduced  
child *deep*  
poverty by **4%**.



# Cash assistance research highlights: What is working?

- The flexibility of cash is a critical component of economic *mobility* b/c families can have very different needs based on their own circumstances
- More frequent (e.g., monthly) payments tend to support great economic *stability*
- In principle, providing cash assistance should have lower operating costs
- Larger effects are seen
  - When benefits are more generous
  - For those with the least resources

# TANF research highlights: Potential challenges?

- Limited reach
- TANF restrictions (e.g., sanctions, time limits, expanded disregard) were associated with reduced benefits (i.e., increased rates of child maltreatment)
- Benefits have not kept up with inflation
- Randomized controlled trials in the 1990s demonstrated that work requirements slightly improved *short-term* employment but in unstable jobs where they did not earn enough to escape deep poverty

# TANF: Funding structure

Federal funding for the TANF block grant has been set at \$16.5 billion each year since 1996; it has not changed with inflation. State allotments have not changed to account for demographic changes or population growth.

To receive federal funds and avoid a fiscal penalty, states must also spend some of their own dollars, known as “maintenance of effort” (MOE) spending.

States can use federal TANF and state MOE dollars to meet any of the four purposes set out in the 1996 law: (1) assisting families in need; (2) reducing dependency by promoting job preparation, work, & marriage; (3) prevent pregnancy among unmarried persons; (4) encourage 2-parent families.



# TANF: categories of spending

## Total TANF Spending by Category, Fiscal Year 2020

Category	Amount Spent (rounded in billions)	Share of Total Spending
Basic Assistance	\$7.1	22%
Work, Education, and Training Activities	\$3.0	10%
Work Supports and Supportive Services	\$0.8	2%
Child Care	\$5.2	17%
Refundable Tax Credits	\$2.8	9%
Pre-Kindergarten/Head Start	\$2.7	9%
Child Welfare	\$2.6	8%
Program Management	\$3.2	10%
Other	\$4.1	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$31.5</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Source: CBPP analysis of Department of Health and Human Services 2020 TANF financial data

# TANF: Federal cash assistance guidelines



Cash assistance should only be provided to “needy” families



Cash assistance cannot be provided from federal funds for longer than 60 months to a family that includes an adult recipient



TANF participants are required to assign their rights to child support to the state



States must meet work participation rate (WPR) targets or face a penalty; states are also required to impose a sanction for non-compliance without good cause



For non-disabled adults, must be a citizen or legal permanent resident (LPR) who has lived in the US for 5+ years; must not have been convicted of a drug felony

# TANF: State flexibilities

## Eligibility

- Income eligibility thresholds (and earned income disregards for existing TANF participants)
- Asset limits
- Job search and work requirements
- State funds can be used to provide benefits to recent immigrants (<5 years)
- Adjust/lift restrictions for those convicted of a drug felony

## Enrollment & Reach

- Simplifying rules and minimizing additional requirements
- Simplifying application & documentation procedures
- Common application for multiple programs
- Recertification timelines and requirements
- Information and application instructions available in multiple languages
- Outreach & messaging focused on reducing stigma

## Benefits

- Set own benefit levels
- Pass-throughs that allow families to keep portion of child support payments
- Sanction policies
- Set own time limits, allow exceptions
- Offer transitional assistance

# TANF: Additional flexibilities during COVID

## Eligibility

- Whether expanded UI benefits counted as income
- Up-front job search and work requirements
- Behavioral requirements (e.g., minimum GPA for dependent children)
- Asset limits

## Enrollment & Reach

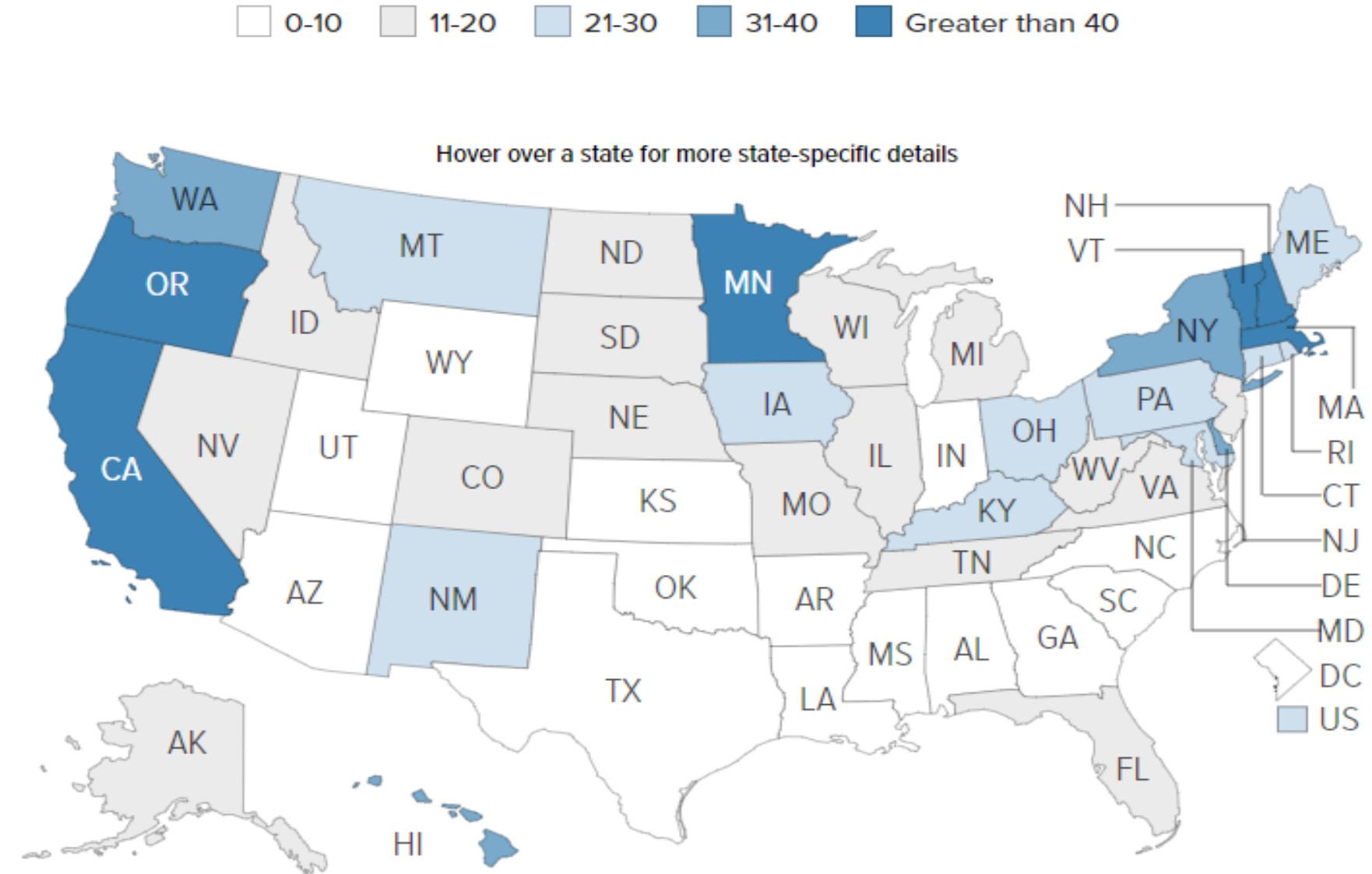
- Adjust recertification procedures
- Waive initial and recertification interview requirements
- Creating/expanding virtual learning opportunities

## Benefits

- Additional federal funds to help finance nonrecurrent short-term (NRST) benefits
- Work sanctions
- Time limits

There is considerable variation in state TANF-to-poverty ratios

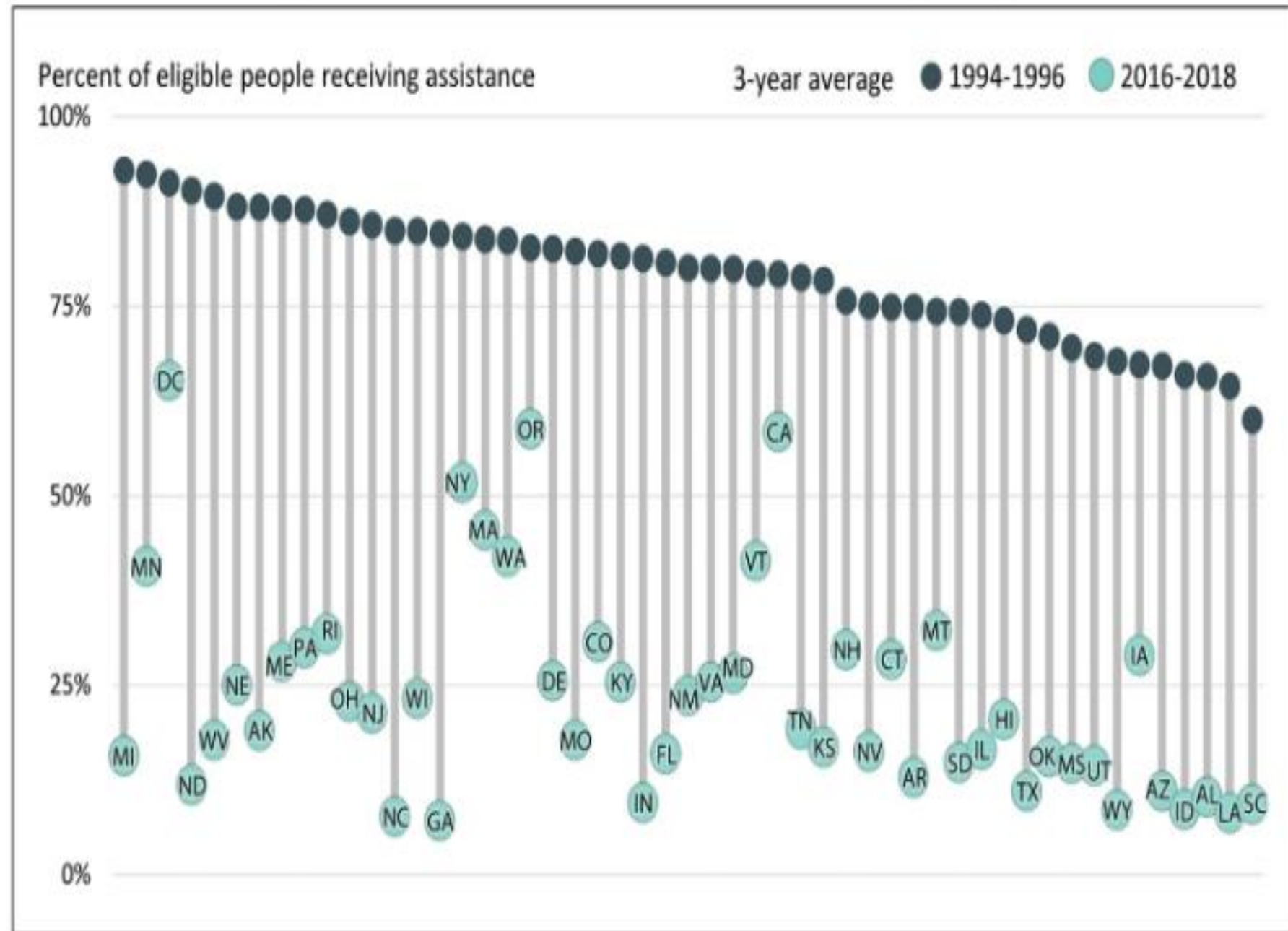
TANF-to-poverty ratio: # of families receiving TANF benefits for every 100 poor families with children (2019-2020)



Note: TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Figures reflect two-year averages for 2019-20.

Source: CBPP analysis of poverty data from the Census' Current Population Survey and TANF spending data collected by CBPP from state agencies.

State  
variation in  
receipt rates  
have  
increased  
over time



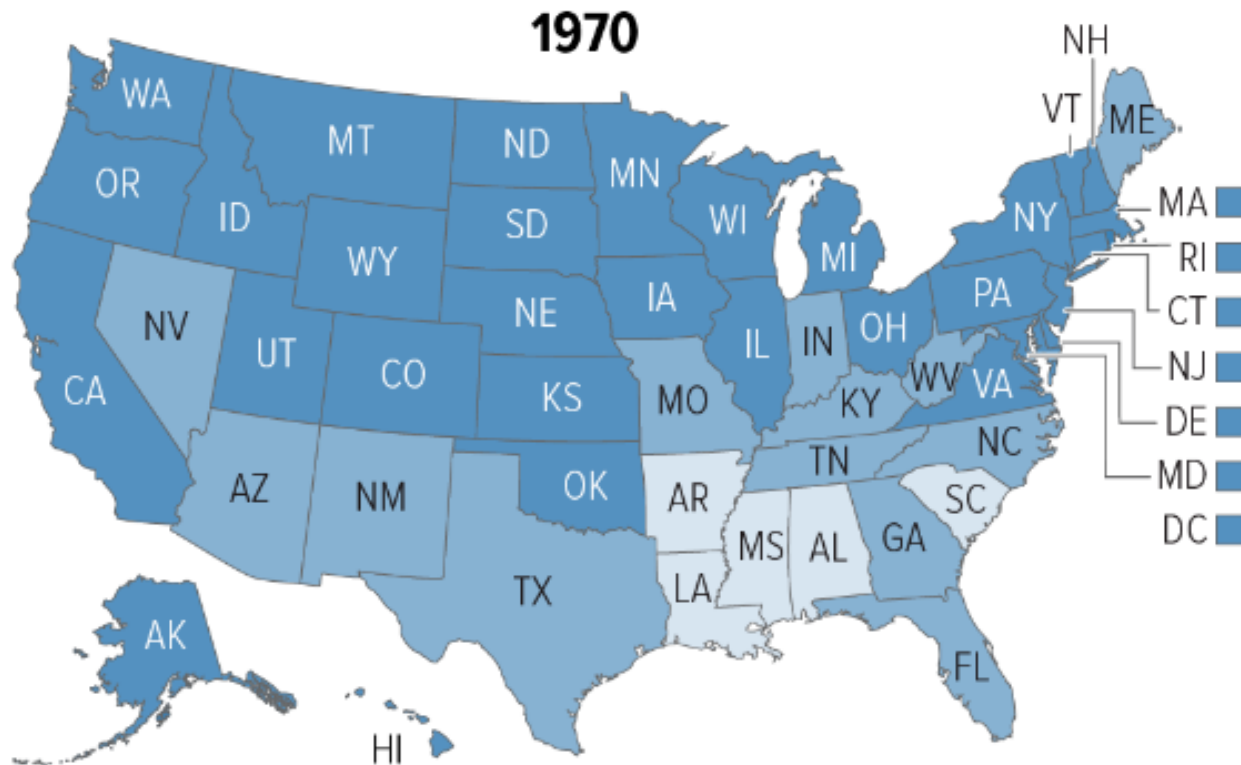
**Source:** Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the TRIM3 microsimulation model



# There is considerable variation in state TANF benefit levels ... and that variation has increased over time

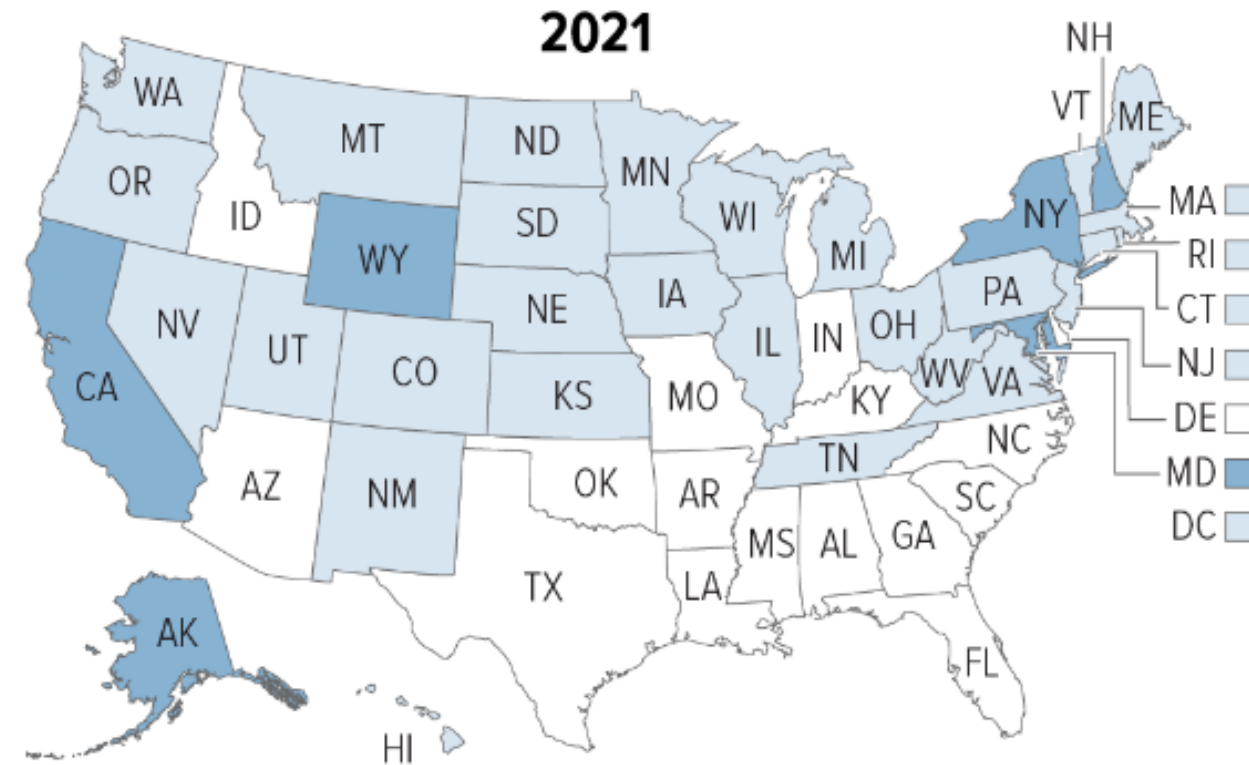
Maximum AFDC/TANF benefits by state as a share of federal poverty guidelines, 1970 vs. 2021

0-20% 20-40% 40-60% Above 60%

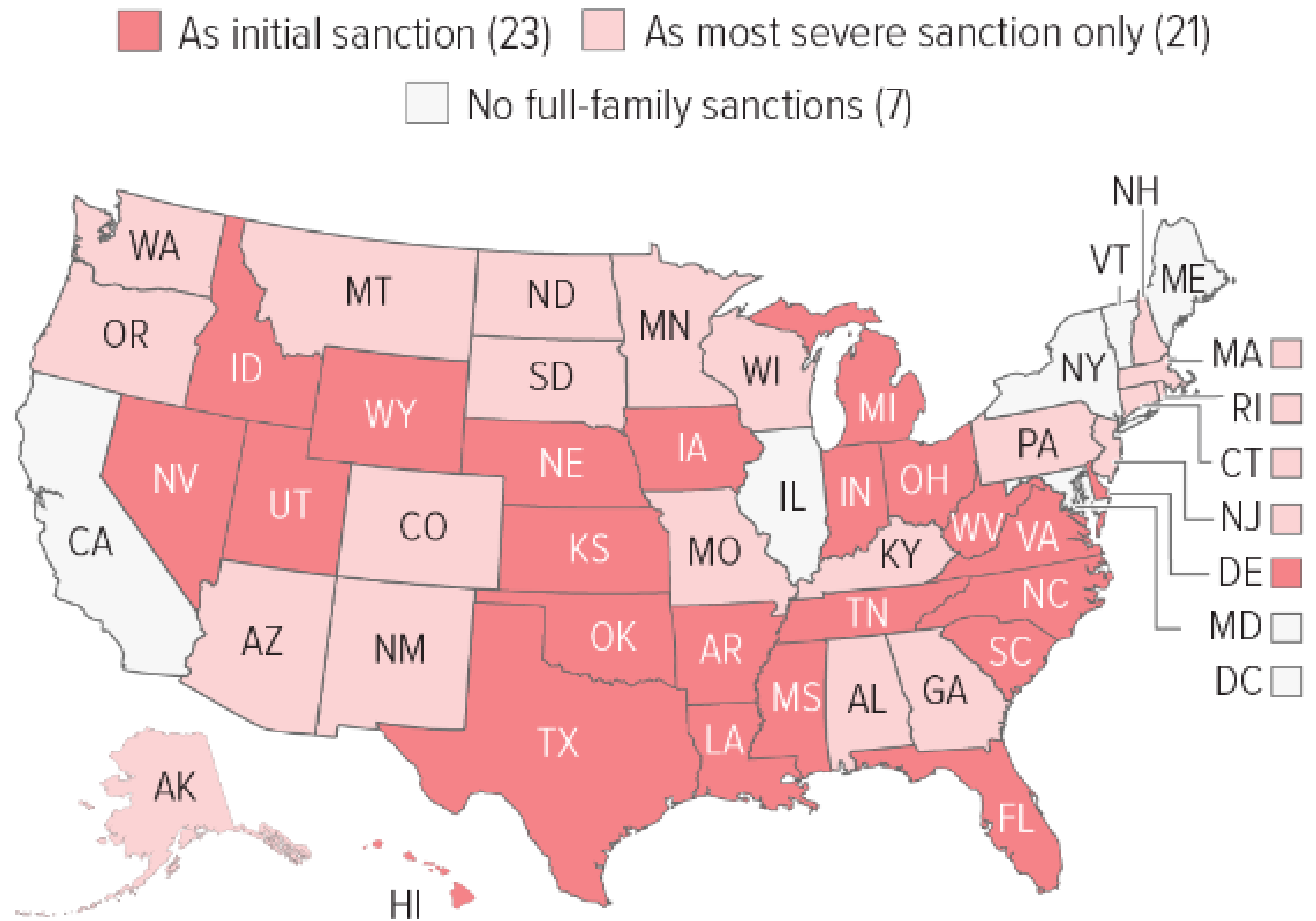


Maximum AFDC/TANF benefits by state as a share of federal poverty guidelines, 1970 vs. 2021

0-20% 20-40% 40-60% Above 60%



There is  
considerable  
variation in  
state  
sanction  
policies



Note: TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Source: CBPP state legislation tracking; Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database

Looking forward:  
Where do we go from here?

# Opportunities for states: Overview/Approach

- Approach program design and implementation with an “investment” lens
  - Keep in mind both short- and long-term goals and benefits (to families and community)
  - Think about eligibility in the context of *need*
  - Think about benefit levels in terms of a “therapeutic dose”

## TWO-GENERATION APPROACH TO LEVERAGING TANF:

DC as a Case Study for Policymakers



# Opportunities to develop research-driven program goals & performance measures

- Develop concrete measurable goals
  - Short-term: family stability
  - Long-term: family self-sufficiency

They are thread running through every person's life

## Foundations of Wellbeing are Interconnected



The stability that comes from good **economic** health can **improve behavioral** health.  
The stability that comes from good **physical** and **behavioral** health **enables economic** health.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ND TANF CASELOAD

TANF helps families with **children who are deprived of parental support or care**, meaning a parent is absent due to divorce, separation, death, or one or both parents are aged or disabled.



8 out of 10 TANF recipients are children

972 families 2392 recipients

Average Individuals by County



\*Asterisk indicates averages below one. According to North Dakota Department of Human Services Economic Assistance Division, SFY 2020.

In North Dakota the TANF Block Grant provides temporary financial assistance averaging **\$297 a month**, work readiness, training and job placement services, and case management support to about **950 qualifying low-income families per month**.<sup>17</sup> Over the last state fiscal year - **81% of individuals served were children** and **52% of the cases were "child only" cases**.<sup>17</sup>



67% native american

26% caucasian

95% U.S. citizens

According to Administration of Children and Families, FFY2020.



58% of households have zero adult participants.

42% of cases have one adult member and 85% are between the ages of 20-34.

Majority of adult participants are female.

According to Administration of Children and Families, FFY2020.



98% enrolled in Medicaid

73% enrolled in SNAP

27% enrolled in subsidized housing

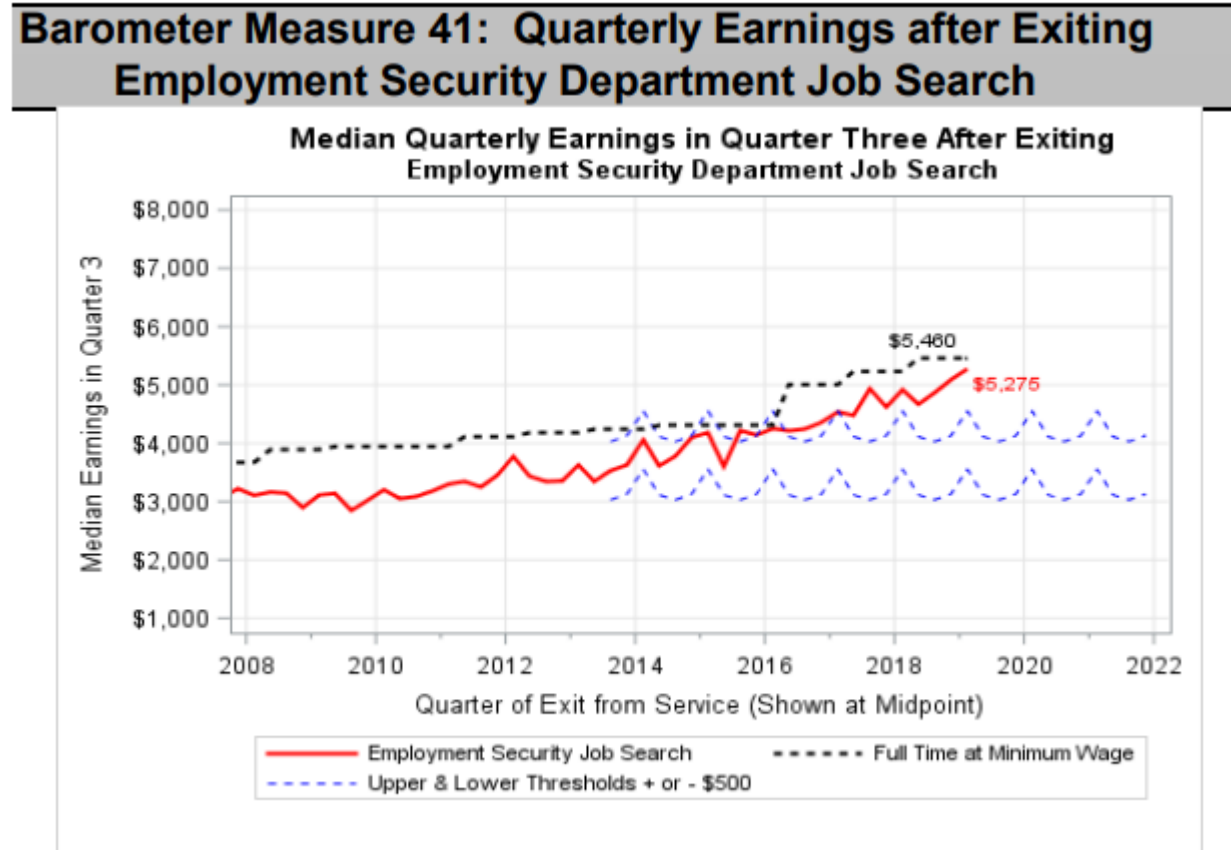
According to Administration of Children and Families, FFY2020.

- Collect data to better understand specific needs of the community you serve



# Opportunities to develop research-driven program goals & performance measures

- Align performance measures to those goals
  - Short-term: e.g., program reach, use of services, basic needs met
  - Long-term: e.g., progress toward goals, education/training, stable employment, earnings
- Collect a range of data to measure progress towards those goals

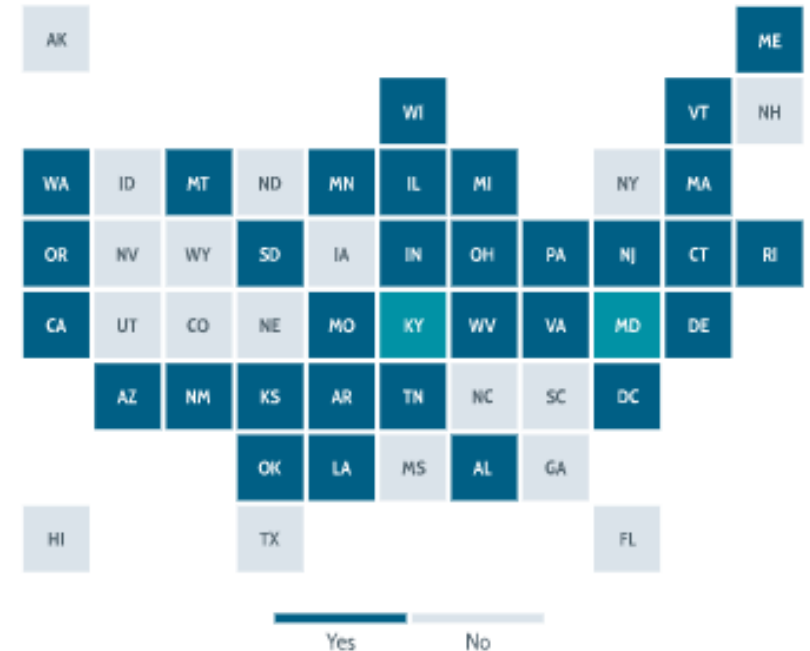


Source: Washington State's WorkFirst Performance Chartbook

# Opportunities to improve reach & access

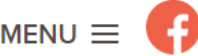
- Use data to understand barriers to access within the community you serve
- Remove restrictions that are outdated, overly onerous (based on family experiences data), and not evidence-based
- Facilitate access to a range of supports via integrated intake and service centers
- Streamline administrative processes and reduce administrative burden

**33** states have implemented a combination of policies to reduce the administrative burden for SNAP.



# Opportunities to improve program impact

- Invest in the core programs that have been shown to be effective at supporting families' short- and long-term wellbeing
- Ensure benefit levels are sufficient to meet need
- Support use of cross-program benefits, integrated services, and transitional supports
- Provide individualized goal-oriented services that address barriers to success



NAVIGATE →

## CLIMB WYOMING NAMED ONE OF NATION'S TEN BEST PROGRAMS

**Cheyenne, WY** – This month, a Wyoming non-profit organization was celebrated as one of the best in the country.

The honor came from the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance and the Promising Pathways Initiative. They named CLIMB Wyoming as one of the nation's ten best programs helping to move people out of poverty.

CLIMB was identified for its innovative approach as a high-performing organization in this field. This national recognition is a result of CLIMB's remarkable and consistent outcomes, evidence-based model design, sophisticated data collection and ability to utilize data to drive and improve program decisions.

Since 1986, CLIMB Wyoming has trained and placed low-income single mothers in careers that successfully support their families. The organization, founded in Cheyenne by Ray Fleming Dinneen, has helped more than 1,300 families across the state into long-term economic security and self-sufficiency.

Hundreds of organizations, including government agencies and non-profit organizations, were considered for the distinction. The surprise selection came to light late last year, and CLIMB Wyoming was the only agency in the entire Rocky Mountain region represented.

Representatives from CLIMB Wyoming attended a conference in Washington, D.C., this month to celebrate the honor and to share information about the organization with experts across the country. Though the



# Federal supports that can help states innovate

## Expand funding to improve services

- For programs to keep up with inflation and effectively meet needs of recipients
- For programs to respond flexibly to changing need and circumstances

## Expand funding for modernization

- For states to streamline administrative processes and reduce administrative burden
- For states to collect data on performance measures & pursue opportunities to test potential improvements

# Federal supports that can help states innovate

## Balance state flexibility with effective national standards

- Where possible:
  - Simplify federal rules
  - Coordinate rules and reporting requirements across programs to facilitate common application process
- Provide federal minimum benchmarks for benefits & eligibility (TANF)

## Re-evaluate program goals and performance standards

- Clearly define program goals
- Incentivize states to spend more of their funds on cash assistance and work activities (TANF)
- Shift focus of accountability measures from compliance to serving families in need and supporting economic mobility
- Create opportunities for states to test and formally evaluate whether new approaches have a measurable impact on outcomes linked to program goals

# Key take-aways

- SNAP and TANF have incredible potential to reduce poverty and economic hardship, which has tangible and important benefits for individual families, the communities in which they live, and public coffers
- There is considerable variation in the reach and impact of these programs across states
- This means that you, as state leaders, have incredible power in making sure families have access to these programs and that they are successful at supporting family economic stability & mobility

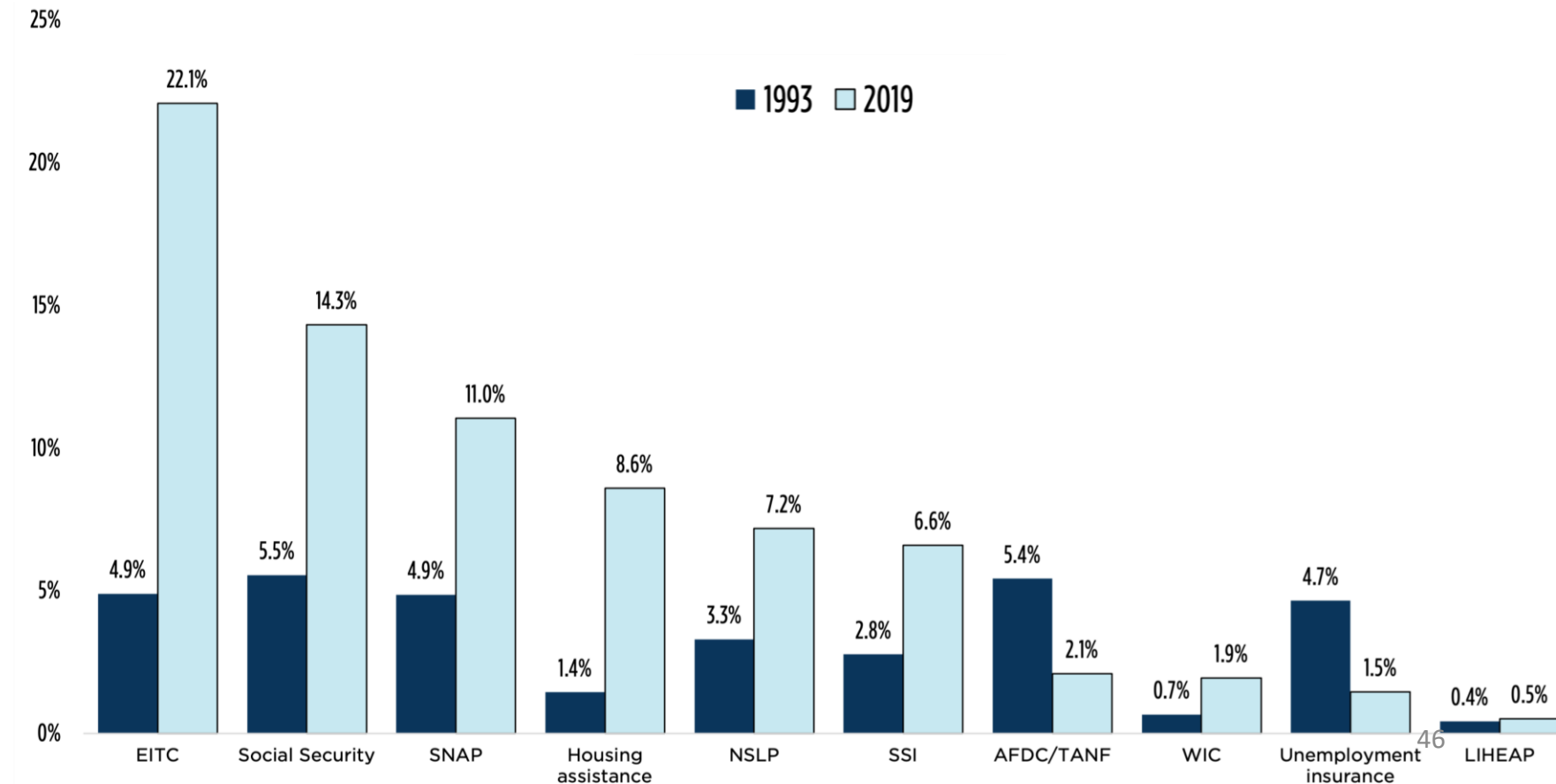
Questions?

# Thank you!

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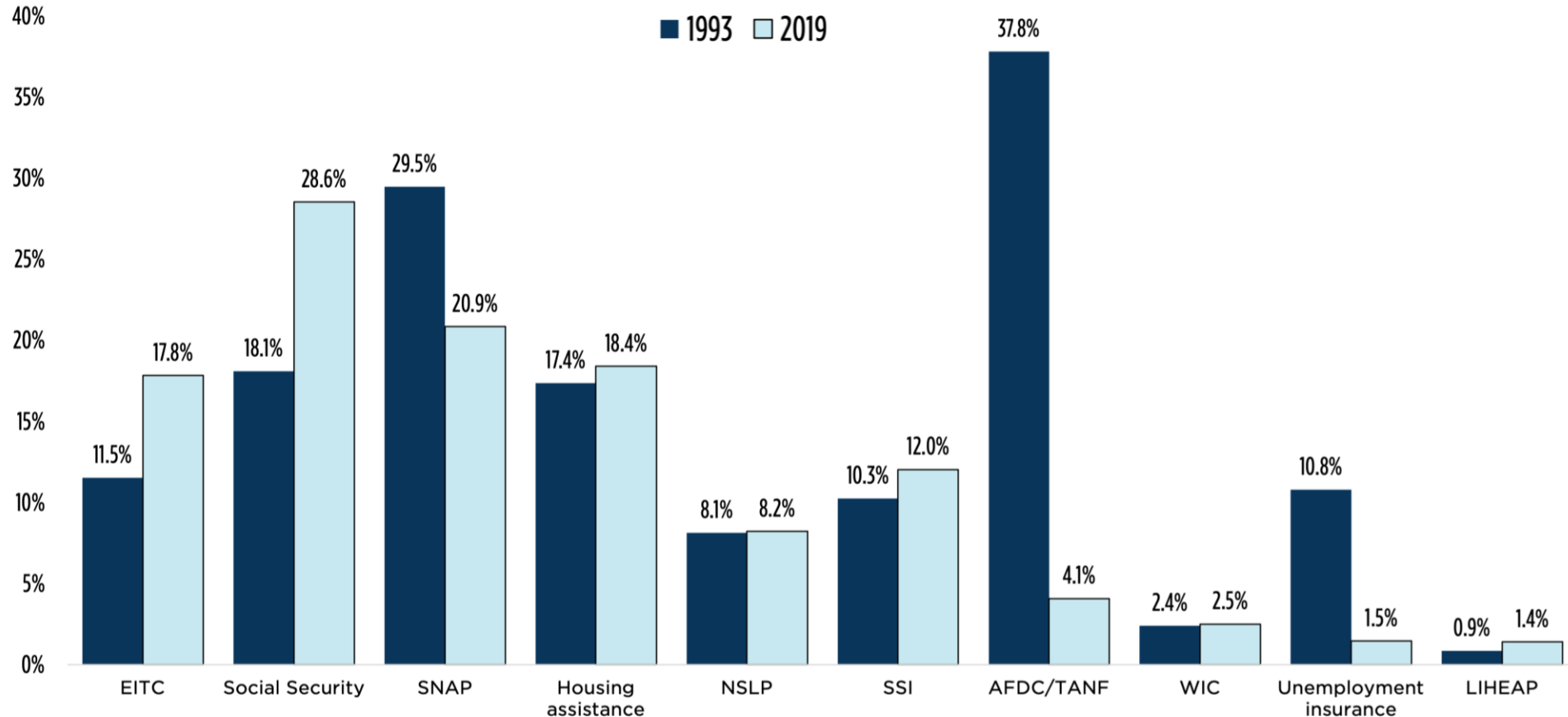
# Protective role of social safety net programs

Percent Decreases in Child Poverty Rates Based on the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM),  
Attributable to Programs that Make up the Social Safety Net, 1993 and 2019



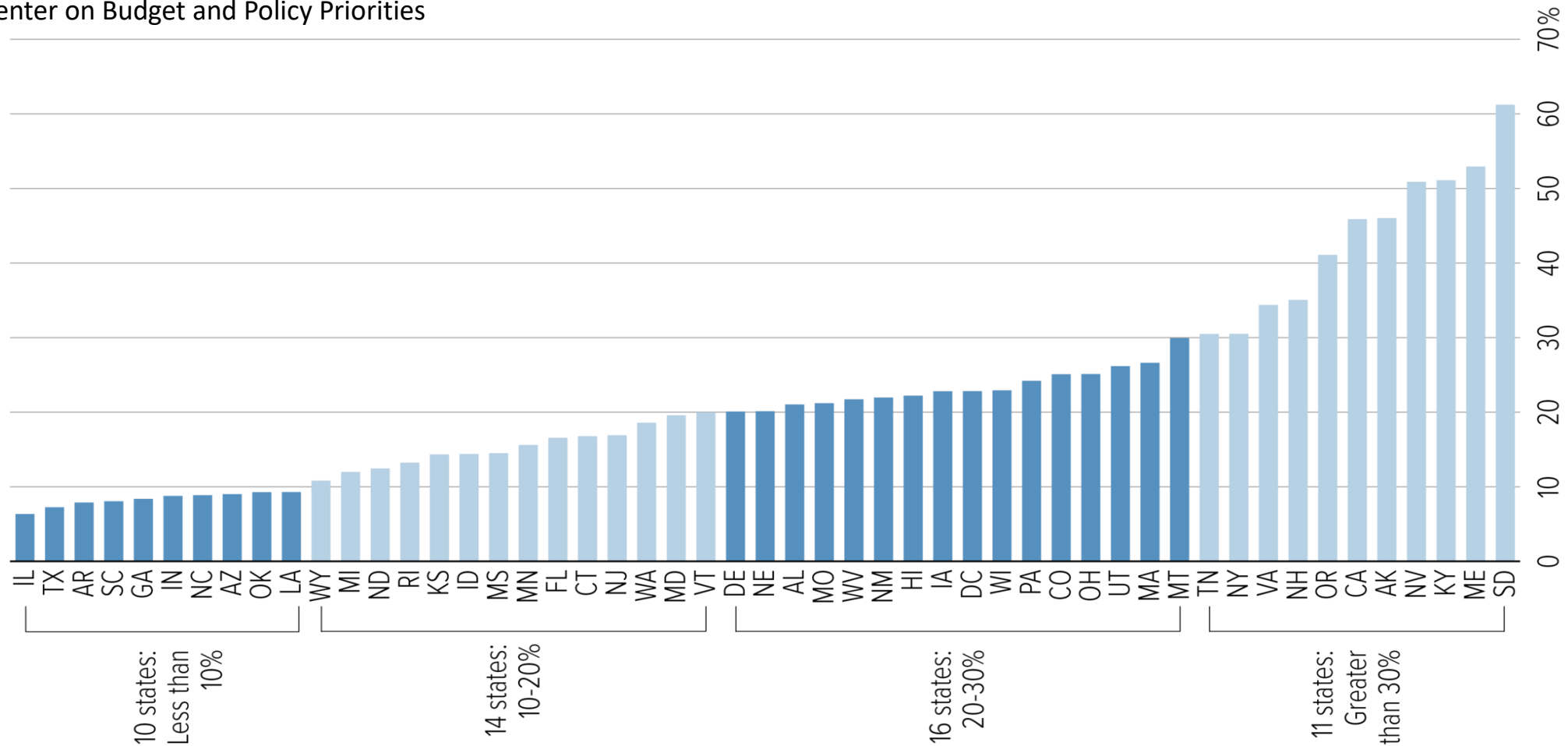
# Protective role of social safety net programs against child deep poverty

Percent Decreases in Child Deep Poverty Rates, Based on the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), Attributable to Programs that Make up the Social Safety Net, 1993 and 2019



# There is considerable variation in the extent to which states allocate funds to cash assistance

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities







# Closing

NCSL Contact Information and Additional Resources

# Register Today

## NCSL Webinar

**SNAP Employment and Training:  
Optimizing Partnerships to Boost  
Economic Security**

**Friday, May 5, from 2 – 3:15 p.m. ET**

**[Register](#)**



# NCSL Resources

- [Economic Mobility Legislation Database](#)
- [2022 Economic Mobility Legislative Trends Report](#)
- [Child Tax Credit Overview](#)
- [Earned Income Tax Credit Overview](#)
- [Introduction to Benefits Cliffs and Public Assistance Programs](#)
- [Addressing Benefits Cliffs Brief](#)
- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Overview](#)



# Child Trends Resources

- [Lessons from a Historic Decline in Child Poverty: Chapter 3. The Role of the Social Safety Net in Protecting Children from Poverty](#)
- [Data on Families With Low Incomes Across America Can Inform Two-Generation Approaches](#)
- [State-level Data for Understanding Child Poverty](#)





Thank you