

Response to Questions from Jan. 28th Testimony to HHS

1. The committee was interested in exploring how to increase the benefit - Is the ratable reduction percentage or the basic needs standard used in determining benefit amount in state statute or do the feds determine part of this? In 2019, the basic needs was increased from the 2004 basic needs standard to the 2008 standard. The benefit is based on what is appropriated for the program. To increase the benefit, the legislature would need to increase the amount appropriated for financial assistance. Federal law does not dictate state benefit levels. 33 VSA 101(4) states: "Assistance and benefits shall be so administered as to maintain and encourage dignity, self-respect, and self-reliance. It is the legislative intent that assistance granted shall be adequate to maintain a reasonable standard of health and decency based on current cost of living indices. Notwithstanding this subdivision, the Department will amend rules that establish new maximum Reach Up grant amounts only when the General Assembly has taken affirmative action to increase or decrease the Reach Up financial assistance appropriation." In addition, 33 VSA 1103(a) states: "The amount of financial assistance to which an eligible person is entitled shall be determined with due regard to the income, resources, and maintenance available to that person and, as far as funds are available, shall provide that person a reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health. The Commissioner may fix by rule maximum amounts of financial assistance and act to ensure that the expenditures for the programs shall not exceed appropriations for them consistent with section 101 of this title." Both the basic needs standard and the ratable reduction are established in rule to ensure that benefit levels do not exceed available funds.
2. The committee asked for the chart that shows the package of benefits somebody at this income level would receive, including 3SquaresVT, Reach Up, fuel, child care subsidy, etc.
Two charts attached are the most recent we have available currently, from 2019. (Posted separately)
3. Rep. Redmond asked how many RU participants take advantage of childcare
From July through December 2020 an average of 840 children on Reach Up per month have accessed child care. This number has been lower than the average number prior to the pandemic.
4. Rep Pugh would like to know how long we can keep the rules waived that we waived during the pandemic. Under what authority did we waive them? The rules have been waived under the authority of Act 140, Sec. 13, which amended Act 91, Section 4. and continued to authorize the AHS to waive or vary rules to support children and families who receive benefits and services through DCF. This authority expires March 31, 2021.
5. Did all reach up participants receive the \$600 Cares act money and how did Reach Up count this?
We don't have any way of knowing how many received it, because they weren't required to report it. However, we did do a pretty big "push" to encourage case managers to help people apply for it if they hadn't filed taxes. I would also say that since anywhere from 15-20% of households have employment income at any given time, we could probably estimate that at least 20% DID receive the checks. I do think it's probably higher than that though based on case managers helping people

through the process. And we didn't count the stimulus checks as income for the purpose of benefit calculation.

Erin Oalican

Director, Reach Up/TANF Program

Department for Children and Families - Economic Services Division

Cell: 802-585-4621