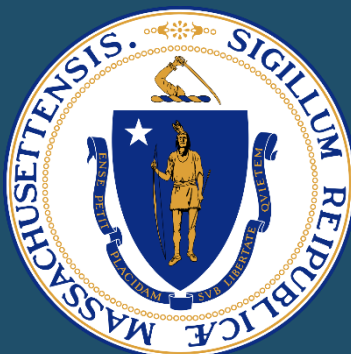


Maura T. Healey
Governor

Kimberley Driscoll
Lieutenant Governor



Kathleen E. Walsh
Secretary

Mary Sheehan
Acting Commissioner

Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Consolidated Report

March 2023



**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE
TRANSITIONAL AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN
CONSOLIDATED REPORT
MARCH 2023**

OVERVIEW

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) submits this report on the status of the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program, as required by sections 2(B) and 5 of Chapter 18 and section 3C(d) of Chapter 118 of the Massachusetts General Laws. This report covers program updates through calendar year 2022.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION

DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic mobility, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports. Currently, DTA serves one out of every seven people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, elders, and people with disabilities.

TAFDC PROGRAM OVERVIEW

TAFDC is a state and federally funded program that provides cash assistance and employment supports to families with children and pregnant women with little or no income. TAFDC is operated under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

In recent years, DTA has emphasized removing barriers to economic mobility and helping families find paths to success. Through policy innovations, the Department has continued to reduce barriers, enhance the Department's employment support programming, and explore new approaches to meaningfully engage with families who receive TAFDC benefits.

CASELOAD & BENEFITS INFORMATION

The TAFDC caseload has risen steadily throughout 2022. This is due in part to a 10% increase to the program's income thresholds and monthly grant amounts included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 General Appropriations Act that expanded eligibility for the program effective October 1, 2022. See **Table 1** for current program payment and eligibility levels.

TABLE I TAFDC PAYMENT & ELIGIBILITY LEVELS		
Household size	Public or subsidized housing	Private housing
1	\$513	\$553
2	\$648	\$688
3	\$783	\$823
4	\$912	\$952
5	\$1,045	\$1,085
6	\$1,183	\$1,223
7	\$1,316	\$1,356
8	\$1,448	\$1,488
9	\$1,580	\$1,620
10	\$1,714	\$1,754
Each additional household member	+\$139	+\$139

Figure 1 below depicts the TAFDC caseload over time. As of December 2022, the TAFDC caseload was 39,123 households, 29% over the program’s pre-pandemic caseload and 60% more than the pandemic low level in July 2021. In 2022, the average time a family remained on benefits decreased by 7 months, from 37 to 30 months.

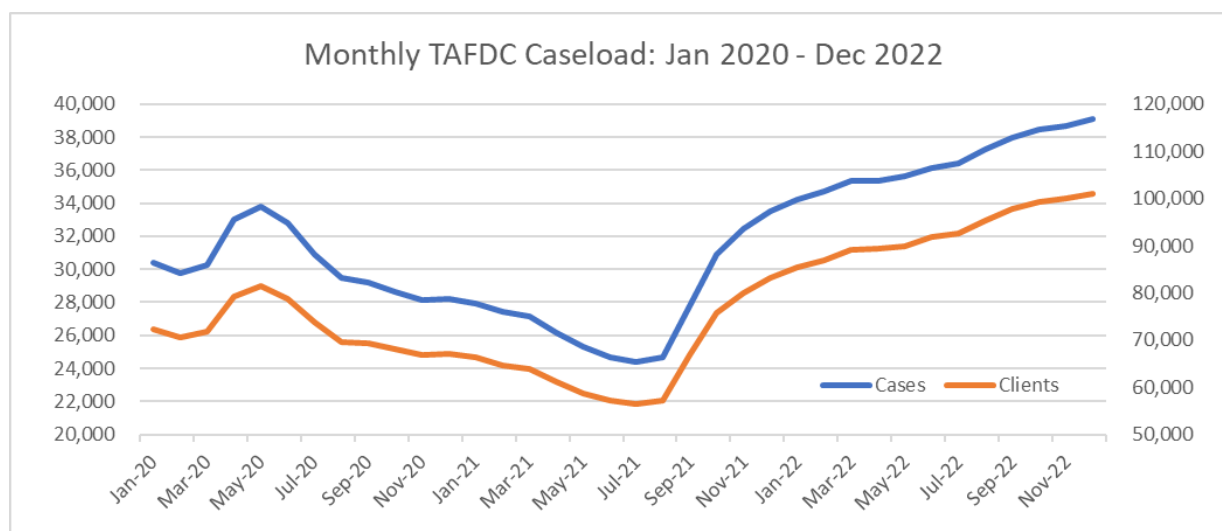


Figure 1. Monthly TAFDC Caseload (January 2020 through December 2022)

IMPROVING PROGRAM ACCESS

The agency continues to expand its digital services to expand access for clients to all programs administered by the Department. For example, as of June 2022 our client-facing web-portal, DTA Connect, is now available in Haitian Creole and clients can also reschedule their appointments with DTA via DTA Connect. Virtual meetings are now an option for TAFDC clients

who want or need a face-to-face interaction but are not able to come into an office. This is a great option for clients who rely on closed captions or when the meeting includes multiple people.

This past year, DTA launched several new and expanded efforts in our local offices to improve accessibility and an inclusive experience. In July 2022, the agency rolled out a client-facing Pictorial Communication Board in all local offices to support clients who are Deaf, hard of hearing, nonverbal or have limited verbal or English proficiency. These boards include images and descriptive words in eight languages to help determine the primary reason for a client's visit. Further, DTA recently procured a new interpreter services vendor, through which we have expanded Video Remote Interpreter (VRI) access to all local DTA offices. VRI is an auxiliary aid that provides video remote American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter services

TAFDC WORK PROGRAM

TAFDC recipients are required to participate in work-related activities as a condition of eligibility, unless specifically exempted. DTA provides employment services for TAFDC clients through the Pathways to Work Program. The primary goals of DTA's employment programs are to assist TAFDC clients to prepare for and connect with career pathways and resolve barriers for sustained employment. DTA case managers connect TAFDC clients to employment and training programs by referring them to appropriate activities based on their skill level and economic mobility goals.

The Pathways to Work program provides access to meaningful, tailored career pathways for families by offering participants more time working with DTA's full engagement workers (FEWs) and providing the supportive services necessary for families to invest in training, education, job readiness activities, and to work on their economic mobility goals. Career pathway programs, when combined with supportive services, make it easier for clients with higher barriers to employment to earn industry-recognized credentials necessary for higher wage jobs; to provide opportunities for more flexible education and training; and to attain market identifiable skills that can transfer into work opportunities that provide for asset retention and economic independence.

DTA's economic assistance case workers and FEWs engage with Pathways to Work-eligible families through new goal-setting and coaching strategies designed to connect participants with opportunities that best match individual career and family goals, and support client's progress as they position themselves to successfully participate in the Commonwealth's labor market.

Participants in work-related activities, including TAFDC Pathways programs and paid employment, are eligible to receive child care and transportation supports. Any TAFDC family who needs child care for employment or to participate in a work activity program is eligible for a referral from DTA.

State law requires TAFDC recipients who meet certain criteria to be exempted from the work program requirement, including if:

- Their youngest child is less than two
- They have a verified disability
- They are in their 33rd week or third trimester of pregnancy
- They are a teen parent attending school full time
- They are over age sixty, or
- They are caring for a disabled household member.

Clients who are exempt from the work program are still encouraged to participate in Pathways to Work programs or other approved employment and training activities, though they do not experience negative consequences if they are not able to participate.

Non-parental relative caregivers, such as grandparents or other extended family members, have the option to receive TAFDC assistance for only the children in their care. In this situation, the relative caregiver is not considered a recipient of assistance and the work program rules are not applicable.

WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

As the Commonwealth focuses on addressing the persistent economic impacts from the pandemic, particularly those affecting communities of color, the Department is committed to supporting the state's economic development and meaningful participation in the workforce for all DTA clients, including those with significant barriers to employment, to ensure economic mobility for all.

DTA continues to explore opportunities to expand on existing initiatives and partnerships that address the needs of the whole family, connecting parents and caregivers with career pathways that match their goals, and providing the necessary supportive services to help families achieve them. All DTA Pathways to Work programs are built on a two-generation approach that helps both parents and their children make progress together and provide interventions that can help break the cycle of multi-generational poverty.

In FY22, DTA expanded the DTA Works Internship Program to include two new sector-based career tracks in healthcare and education. DTA Works partnered with Holyoke Community College, Springfield Public Schools, Springfield Federation of Paraprofessionals, and Springfield WORKS to deliver a new paraeducator training track that provides five weeks of job readiness training, two weeks of paraeducator job specific training, and an in-person internship within a participating public school. All DTA Works interns receive a mentor and financial coaching to help them plan and achieve their goals and support their successful entry or re-entry into full employment along with a monthly stipend.

DTA has also been exploring innovative career pathway and recruitment strategies, in partnership with the Office of Enterprise Staffing & Support (OESS) within the Human Resource Division (HRD), that promote a diverse workforce for the Executive Branch agencies and increase opportunities for individuals receiving public assistance to explore employment with the Commonwealth. Goals of the partnership are to assist participating agencies in sourcing

underemployed candidates with the skills and supports necessary to be successful in the entry level, high demand jobs that are critical to a vibrant economy in Massachusetts and to provide the additional coaching supports necessary to assist individuals and their families in receipt of public assistance that have historically faced increased barriers to participation in employment to prepare for careers in the public sector, particularly in direct care and human services.

DTA also remains a key partner in the state's implementation of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) focused on addressing "cliff effects" for families receiving public assistance. The Economic Development bill signed by the Baker Administration in November 2022 included funding for a pilot to study the impact of cliff effects on families. DTA is working in collaboration with the Economic Development Council of Western MA and the Working Cities Group to develop the pilot program to serve a demographically and geographically representative sample of individuals and families receiving transitional assistance.