



ECDL: Reach Up Advocacy

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Reach Up Basic Facts



Vermont's Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program provides less than 40% of a poverty-level subsistence to about 8,100 Vermonters.

More than 70% of Reach Up participants are children under the age of 18.

**REACH UP
Families, Recipients, and Benefits
By Vermont County for December 2025**

	Families	Recipients	Children Under 19	Monthly Benefits	Benefits Percent
ADDISON COUNTY	103	252	181	\$64,951	3%
BENNINGTON COUNTY	303	780	555	\$183,041	9%
CALEDONIA COUNTY	174	436	301	\$105,410	5%
CHITTENDEN COUNTY	580	1505	1061	\$353,294	18%
ESSEX COUNTY	45	117	79	\$29,569	2%
FRANKLIN COUNTY	318	807	548	\$200,824	10%
GRAND ISLE COUNTY	44	129	86	\$28,243	1%
LAMOILLE COUNTY	92	236	167	\$55,385	3%
ORANGE COUNTY	105	273	196	\$66,205	3%
ORLEANS COUNTY	163	433	302	\$98,255	5%
RUTLAND COUNTY	367	920	665	\$222,612	12%
WASHINGTON COUNTY	267	691	484	\$170,342	9%
WINDHAM COUNTY	285	740	517	\$156,700	8%
WINDSOR COUNTY	312	791	563	\$187,206	10%
UNKNOWN COUNTY	7	20	12	\$4,740	0%
STATE TOTAL	3165	8130	5717	\$1,926,776	100%

Prepared by the Economic Services Division
Vermont Department for Children and Families
1/13/2026

Reach Up Basic Facts

The formula DCF uses to determine benefits is outdated and harmful, providing less than 40% of a poverty-level budget to Vermont's most economically disadvantaged children.



Subsistence budget
based on the cost
of living in **2019**

+



Housing Allowance based
on what RU participants
reported spending on
housing in **2001**.

x

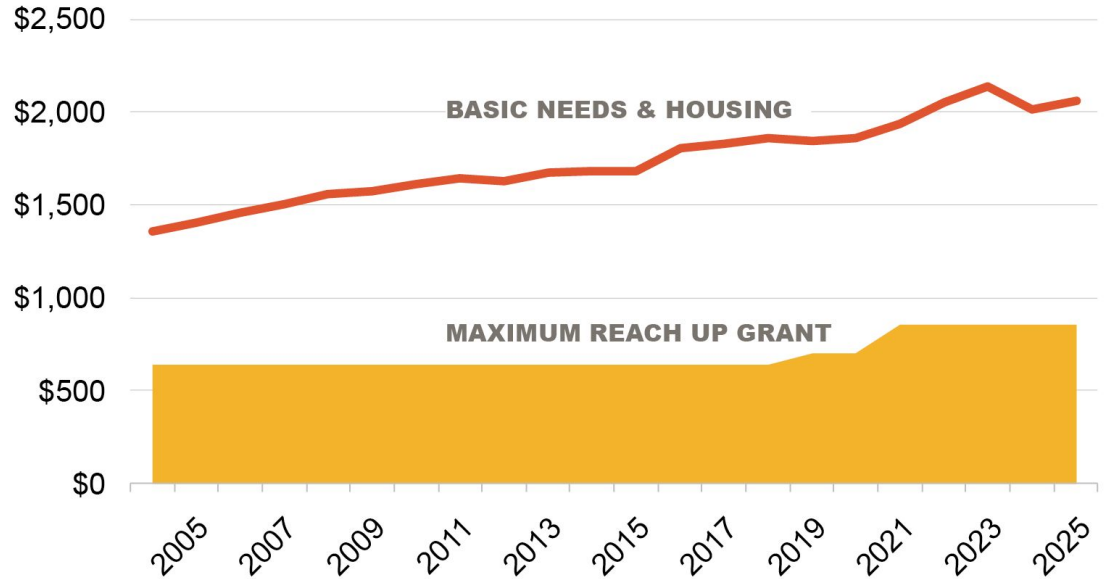


Ratable
Reduction
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The formula DCF uses to determine benefits is outdated and harmful, providing less than 40% of a poverty-level budget to Vermont's most economically disadvantaged children.

Reach Up grant leaves Vermonters with less than half of what they need

Cost of basic needs and housing, and maximum monthly Reach Up grant, family of three, 2004-2025



Note: The Department for Children and Families bases the cost of housing on the median cost reported by Reach Up participants. This value fell in 2024, despite overall growth in median rent costs in Vermont between 2023 and 2024.

Data source: Vermont Department for Children and Families
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How Does Reach Up Fall Short?



“It would help a lot if the grant was more especially with the economy the way it is and with housing being so expensive. The apartments for our family size is \$1,500 per month or more.”

“They need to figure out more consistent amount to give to people. We can’t plan for the future when we are barely surviving as is.”

“In the rules, you’re not allowed to save.”

A hand-drawn style speech bubble with a black outline and a tail pointing towards the bottom left. The text inside is in a teal color.

Parents who receive
Reach Up say...

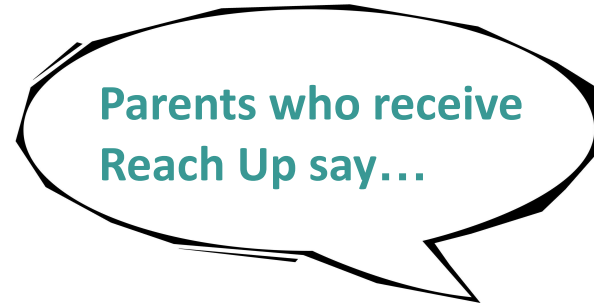
“It's not enough to cover rent, utilities, and children's needs, laundry etc.”

“The state isn’t working with us to see what our families need and yet they’re dictating what we need”.

How Does Reach Up Fall Short?



“Increase the amount of housing vouchers for low-income people since it's impossible to get by on Reach Up if you have to pay full rent.”



Parents who receive
Reach Up say...

“We are barely scraping by and can't save anything because we will have our benefits decreased or lose them all together.”

“My hope is for my children to have everything they need to thrive.”

I get enough food with money but this doesn't pay for other essentials that are needed. Over the counter medications, feminine products for myself and older daughter, along with other essentials.



ASK #1: Implement Act 49!



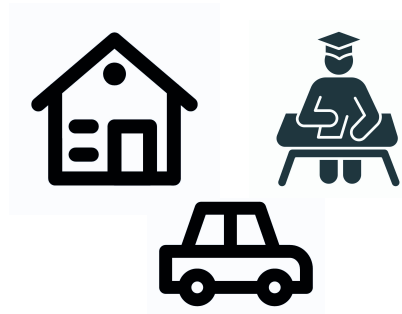
- DCF estimated the cost to increase the ratable to 60% in year one @ \$6m.
- ◆ Reinvesting the \$3.4m caseload savings in FY27 could increase the ratable to $\approx 55\%$
- This would increase the max grant for a family of three by almost \$100/mo, or $> 10\%$:
 - ◆ **From \$880 to \$977** in ChittCo (inflation = \$1,048)
 - ◆ **From \$856 to \$949** rest of state (inflation = \$1,020)

Legislative Update

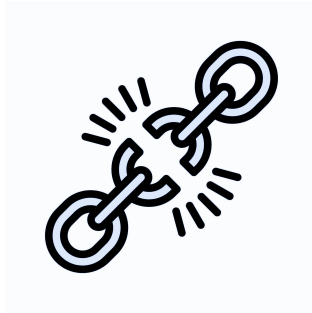
- Budget Adjustment - DCF cut \$2.23m due to “downward caseload pressures” aka “caseload savings.”
- FY27 Budget continues this trend, with a reduction of \$3.4m from the FY26 approved budget. **-12.4%**
- Act 49 (2023) directed DCF to create an actionable, phased plan that estimates the amount needed to remove the ratable reduction in the Reach Up program over 5 years.
- DCF published the Act 49 report in 2024, but neither the administration nor the legislature has moved forward with implementation.

ASK #2: Remove the Reach Up Asset Limit

We **support** eliminating the asset limit to:



Reduce barriers to transportation, housing, and investments in education.



Reduce bureaucratic burden, improving participants' access to their case manager for essential support.



Better align eligibility rules across benefits programs.

ASK #3: Exempt Lump Sum Payments from Eligibility Determination

We suggest additional language to count **lump sum payments as an asset**, not income, and exempt them from eligibility determination.



- Reduce administrative burden caused by complex rules that are subject to the interpretation and discretion of DCF/ES staff.
- Reduce risk of federal payment error rate scrutiny.

Support Asset-Building and Stability

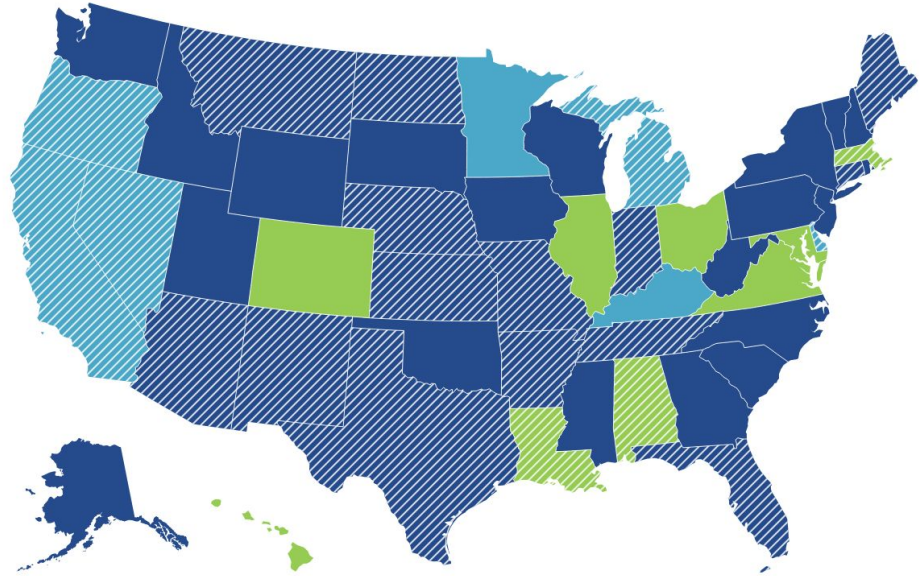


- **Reduce disruptions** in children's economic security from eligibility churn.
- Allow families to focus on **economic mobility and asset-building**, and let case managers focus on providing support, not acting as forensic accountants.
- **Incentivize mutual aid and resourcefulness** in the face of diminishing state income support.

National Policy Patchwork

TANF Asset Limits & Treatment of Lump Sum Payments

■ No Asset Limit ■ \geq \$10k Asset Limit ■ \leq \$9k Asset Limit ▨ Lump Sums excluded from income



Asset limits as of 2023. States w/ striped overlay treat lump sums as assets in the month received. Other states treat lump sums as income for one or more months. Either approach may impact eligibility.

Map: Voices for VT's Children • Source: Urban Institute | Welfare Rules Database • Created with Datawrapper

Legislative Update

- The asset limit elimination bill was folded into an omnibus DCF bill, H. 657 in House Human Services
- They are marking up the bill and tentatively voting today.
- As of yesterday, not clear where the committee stands on the Reach Up language in the bill.

Reach Up Coalition Members

