

**LOUISIANA BUDGET PROJECT**

# RECONNECTING LOUISIANA'S OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About 1 in 6 young adults in Louisiana, ages 16 to 24, are neither in school nor employed.<sup>1</sup> This population, known as Opportunity Youth, are more likely to live in poverty than their peers and often lack the education, experiences, or resources needed to find stable, sustainable employment. Some of these young people face challenges such as housing insecurity or addiction, or care for children of their own.

The challenges that Opportunity Youth face are not unique. They are shared by low and moderate income people and families of all ages in Louisiana. But these young people do require more targeted assistance than older people in comparable situations, both because they are often a part of families struggling to make ends meet and because not all public assistance programs were designed with young adults in mind:

“Young people struggle very differently than in the past,” one state welfare administrator told LBP. “If you get a job, you’re getting a job for your whole family. Frequently, we’re asking young people to do things that frighten their families. They may come from households that need them to work, to provide. And even if they don’t, disparities between young people are amplified - especially because young people need support for much longer than they used to.”

Put another way - for many low income families, there are already deep disconnections from institutions that higher income families take for granted as a standard part of growing up. For example, higher education, and the debt often required to finance it, can look and feel like a daunting sacrifice for people coming from families living paycheck to paycheck.

Despite numerous federal, state, and local programs existing to serve low-income people, including Opportunity Youth, too many young Louisianans fall through the gaps in the social safety net and are hampered by needs that those programs don’t meet. Complex administrative requirements, rigid eligibility tests, and inadequate funding limit the effectiveness of many public benefit programs that could serve these youth. Even when Opportunity Youth successfully receive benefits, significant needs outside the scope of existing programs present serious obstacles to their sustainable economic stability and independence.

This report identifies many of the programs and funds that may be used for and by Opportunity Youth in Louisiana, and provides detailed analysis of how a few specific programs funded by the federal government but administered by state government - Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF), Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) - can be better leveraged on behalf of Opportunity Youth.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, K., 2021. A Portrait of Louisiana 2020. Measure of America, p.10. Available at: <[https://s3.amazonaws.com/moa/A\\_Portrait\\_of\\_Louisiana\\_2020.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/moa/A_Portrait_of_Louisiana_2020.pdf)>

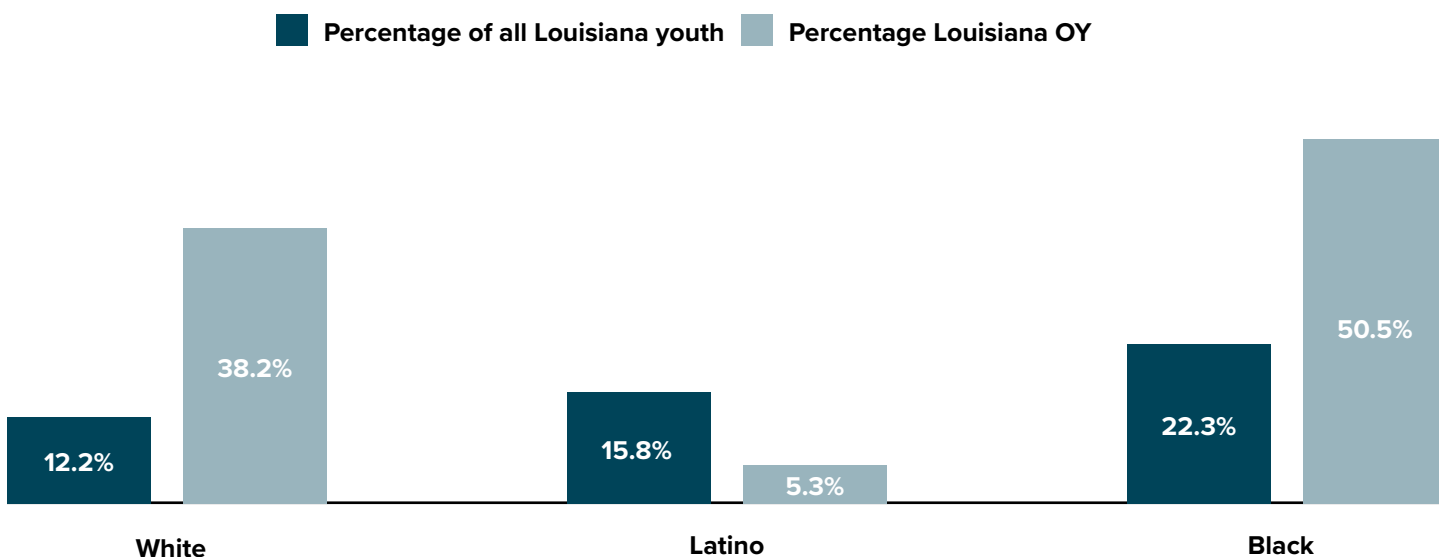
## UNDERSTANDING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH IN LOUISIANA

Opportunity Youth are 16 to 24 year-olds who are neither in school nor working, a circumstance also called “disconnection.”<sup>2</sup> Young people in Louisiana are more likely to be disconnected from work and education than their peers in other states. - 16.4% compared to 11.2% nationally, the fourth highest youth disconnection rate in the United States.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

Due to generations of discrimination, Opportunity Youth in Louisiana are disproportionately Black, with 1 in every 5 young Black Louisianans neither employed nor in school.<sup>6</sup> Black people make up more than half of Louisiana’s Opportunity Youth, despite making up only one-third of Louisiana’s population<sup>7</sup> and just over 1-in-5 Louisiana youth ages 16 to 24.<sup>8</sup> This higher rate of disconnection is directly related to Black Louisianans having less access to wealth, lower incomes, and greater rates of incarceration than white Louisianans.

## LOUISIANA’S OPPORTUNITY YOUTH ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY BLACK

Percentage by race or ethnicity



**Chart 1, source:** Measure of America. “Youth Disconnection by Gender and Race/Ethnicity.” In A Portrait of Louisiana 2020. New York: Social Science Research Council, 2020.

These statistics reflect pre-Covid-19 rates of disconnection. Research by the Economic Policy Institute has found that unemployment rates for young adults, particularly young workers of color, rose dramatically from Spring 2019 to Spring 2020, mainly because the sectors of the economy most affected by Covid-19 are also the most likely to employ young workers.<sup>9</sup>

2 Youth.gov. 2022. Opportunity Youth | Youth.gov. Available at: <<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/opportunity-youth>>

3 Lewis, K., 2020. A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus. Measure of America. Available at: <<https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone.pdf>>

4 Lewis, K., 2021. A Portrait of Louisiana 2020. [online] Measure of America, p.26. Available at: <[https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/A\\_Portrait\\_of\\_Louisiana\\_2020.pdf](https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/A_Portrait_of_Louisiana_2020.pdf)>

5 Lewis, K., 2020. A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus. Measure of America. Available at: <<https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone.pdf>>

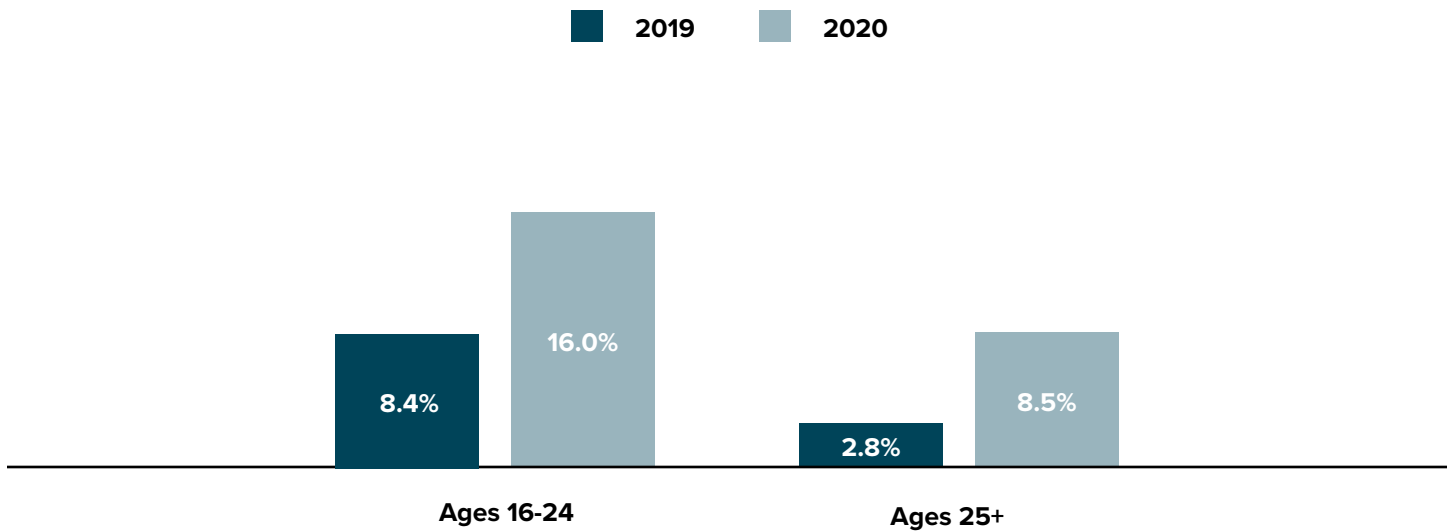
6 Lewis, K., 2021. A Portrait of Louisiana 2020. Measure of America, p.40. Available at: <[https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/A\\_Portrait\\_of\\_Louisiana\\_2020.pdf](https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/A_Portrait_of_Louisiana_2020.pdf)>

7 2022. QuickFacts - Louisiana. Available at: <<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/LA>>

8 Lewis, K., 2021. A Portrait of Louisiana 2020. [online] Measure of America, p.40. Available at: <[https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/A\\_Portrait\\_of\\_Louisiana\\_2020.pdf](https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/A_Portrait_of_Louisiana_2020.pdf)>

9 Gould, E. and Kassa, M., 2020. Young workers hit hard by the COVID-19 economy: Workers ages 16 - 24 face high unemployment and an uncertain future. Available at: <<https://www.epi.org/publication/young-workers-covid-recession/>>

# UNEMPLOYMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC WAS SIGNIFICANTLY WORSE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THAN ADULTS OVER 25



**Chart 2, source:** Economic Policy Institute, “Young workers hit hard by the COVID-19 economy: Workers ages 16–24 face high unemployment and an uncertain future”

No two young adults experiencing disconnection necessarily face the same obstacles (though many face similar ones). An unemployed 18-year-old high school graduate who has not pursued higher education while still living at home faces different challenges than a person of the same age who has lost a job needed to help support their family or dropped out of school because they are experiencing homelessness. All situations, however, would meet the definition of Opportunity Youth. In general, Opportunity Youth are more likely to be living in poverty and less likely to have completed high school<sup>10</sup> or obtained more than a high school diploma than other young adults of the same age.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, disconnected white youth and Opportunity Youth of color face different challenges, even when they come from similar economic backgrounds. Numerous studies have shown that Black people continue to face discrimination in hiring practices, are disproportionately policed and incarcerated, and more likely to be given harsher sentences than white people in the United States.<sup>12, 13</sup> This treatment applies in school settings as well: Black children are disproportionately likely to be disciplined and suspended from school, which can result in more surveillance, interactions with the criminal justice system, or expulsion.<sup>14</sup>

Many of these problems facing Opportunity Youth are not unique to their age group nor, fortunately, are they mysteries without known solutions. Housing insecurity, poverty, joblessness, and challenges accessing education affect people of all age groups, and are problems that often have clear policy solutions. Additionally, young people experiencing these problems have already been prioritized by many federal, state, and local workforce development, educational assistance, and anti-poverty programs. But many of these programs can be overly rigid in who qualifies for assistance, and are often either

10 Lewis, K., 2020. A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus. Measure of America. Available at: <<https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/ADecadeUndone.pdf>>

11 Jobs for the Future. 2018. Alleviating Poverty for Opportunity Youth. Available at: <[https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/HEA\\_Poverty\\_121918.pdf](https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/HEA_Poverty_121918.pdf)>

12 Bertrand, M. and Mullainathan, S., 2003. Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination. National Bureau of Economic Research. Available at: <<https://www.nber.org/papers/w9873>>

13 Hinton, E., Henderson, L. and Reed, C., 2018. An Unjust Burden: The Disparate Treatment of Black Americans in the Criminal Justice System. Available at: <<https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/for-the-record-unjust-burden-racial-disparities.pdf>>

14 Governmental Accountability Office, 2018. Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities. Available at: <<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-258.pdf>>

inadequately funded or insufficiently generous to address the scale of the challenges facing Opportunity Youth.

## **MAPPING LOUISIANA'S FUNDING FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH**

There are dozens of federal and state workforce development, educational assistance, and social safety net programs serving people ages 16 to 24 in Louisiana. But many of these programs are insufficient to meet the needs of all Opportunity Youth, either due to lack of sufficient funding, complex eligibility requirements, or administrative inflexibility. Fortunately, some of these programs or funding sources can be used in combination with one another, can be supplemented by other public or private funding to maximize impact, or can be administered in different ways by state and local agencies in order to increase the amount and scope of assistance available to Opportunity Youth.

Programs aimed at Opportunity Youth typically fall into one of two broad categories: workforce development programs, which provide skills training or job-search assistance; and educational assistance programs, which typically provide subsidized loans, grants and scholarships.

Workforce development programs typically focus on job training and aim to get participants into jobs quickly. These programs may have more short-term payoff for young people, or provide financial support for meeting immediate needs. Educational assistance programs, in contrast, aim to help Opportunity Youth train for professions that often have comparatively high long-term earnings but that may have steep short term costs associated with a loss of paid work hours while participants pursue their education.

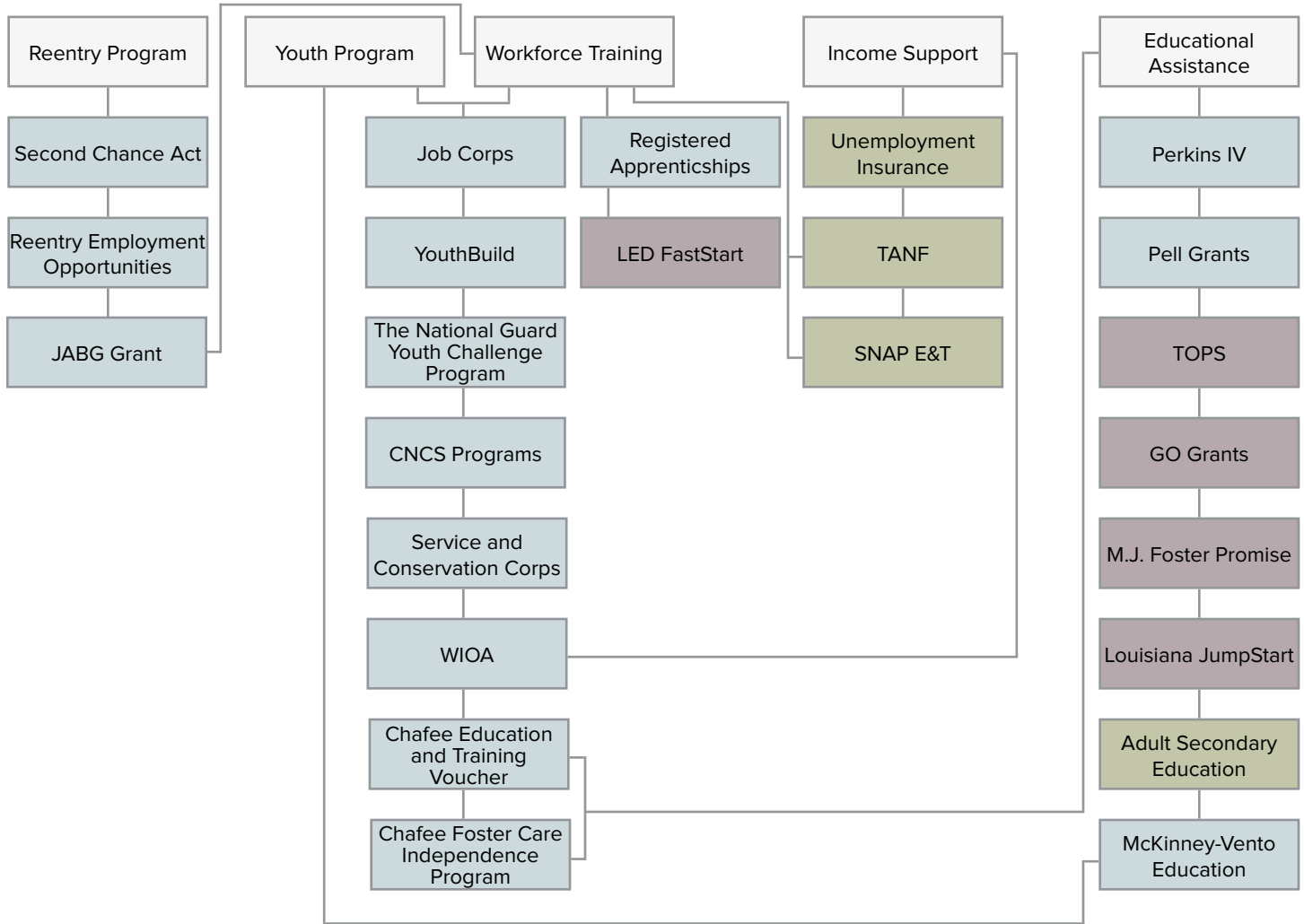
Both types of programs ultimately aim to provide training or education to secure more stable and higher-paying employment. But educational assistance often requires a greater investment of time and money, and usually provides less support than some young people may need.

For example, a young adult might qualify for need-based aid such as federal Pell Grants, state-financed Go Grants or M.J. Foster Promise grants to cover some tuition and fees for a college education, while also qualifying for a workforce program that offers job training with regular pay through SNAP E&T. Given a choice between accepting educational assistance that can only pay for tuition versus a workforce program that can help pay for childcare, rent, or for transportation, the immediate benefits of the workforce program, even if it comes with a long-term cost of lower earning potential, may outweigh the long-term benefits of seeking a college degree, which would come with more unmet but immediate costs. This is particularly likely for people in circumstances that make it difficult to complete a college degree - for example, those who have children, who live in unstable housing environments, or who lack access to public transportation and cannot afford their own car.

The following list includes all programs identified by our research that serve Opportunity Youth in Louisiana. Following sections evaluate some particular programs in greater depth (Temporary Aid for Needy Families, the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act programs, and SNAP Employment and Training).



# THERE ARE DOZENS OF FEDERAL, STATE, AND BLENDED OR BRAIDED PROGRAMS SERVING PEOPLE AGES 16 TO 24 IN LOUISIANA



FEDERAL PROGRAM	NOTES
<p><b>Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education program (Perkins IV):</b><sup>15</sup> A federal grant program for secondary and postsecondary career and technical education programs (“Perkins Grants”). Approximately \$1.1 billion per year is appropriated for state formula grants and another \$25 million is awarded in competitive discretionary grants to Native American and Native Hawaiian programs.</p>	<p>State allocations are based on a population-based formula. States determine how funds are allocated between secondary and postsecondary programs in their state. For federal fiscal year 2021, Louisiana was allocated \$23.2 million.<sup>16</sup></p>
<p><b>Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program:</b><sup>17</sup> ETV provides tuition support of up to \$9,000 annually for former foster youth enrolling in postsecondary educational and training programs.</p>	
<p><b>Chafee Foster Care Independence Program:</b><sup>18</sup> A grant program operated by the Office of the Administration of Children and Families through the Children’s Bureau, designed to support current and former foster youth. Grants are provided to states and tribes that submit plans to help foster youth as they transition to adulthood, including by providing educational, employment, and housing support. For Louisiana, these grants are managed by the Department of Children and Family Services.</p>	<p>The grant is designed for youth who are likely to remain in foster care until they are 18, youth who have left foster care for adoption or guardianship upon turning 16, and adults 18 to 21 who have “aged out” of the foster care system.</p>
<p><b>Corporation for National &amp; Community Service (CNCS) programs:</b><sup>19</sup> CNCS houses all AmeriCorps programs, including AmeriCorps State and National<sup>20</sup> and VISTA<sup>21</sup> programs, as well as the National Civilian Conservation Corps (NCCC) and NCCC FEMA Corps.<sup>22</sup> Young adults may participate in all of these program, some of which are specifically designed with disconnected youth in mind.</p>	<p>Louisiana hosts numerous state AmeriCorps programs, managed by the Volunteer Louisiana Commission.<sup>23</sup></p>
<p><b>Jobs Corps:</b><sup>24</sup> A full-time, residential, education and vocational training program administered by the U.S Department of Labor (DOL) and implemented in 123 locations nationwide by for-profit, public, and nonprofit entities. The program helps economically at-risk youth, ages 16 to 24, earn a high school diploma or GED, learn career skills, and connect to job opportunities.</p>	<p>Louisiana’s three Job Corps centers are located in Carville, New Orleans, and Shreveport.</p>

15 Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, U.S. Department of Education. Perkins IV. Available at: <<https://cte.ed.gov/legislation/about-perkins-iv>>

16 Miller, S., 2021. Estimated Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 State Allocations under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V). U.S. Department of Education. Available at: <[https://s3.amazonaws.com/PCRN/file/Program\\_Memo-Estimated\\_FY\\_2021\\_Perkins\\_State\\_Allocations.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PCRN/file/Program_Memo-Estimated_FY_2021_Perkins_State_Allocations.pdf)>

17 Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance. Chafee Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) Program. Available at: <<https://mylosfa.la.gov/students-parents/scholarships-grants/chafee/>>

18 Administration for Children and Families. John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. Available at: <<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/grant-funding/john-h-chafee-foster-care-independence-program>>

19 Grants.gov. Corporation for National & Community Service. Available at: <<https://www.grants.gov/learn-grants/grant-making-agencies/corporation-for-national-community-service.html>>

20 AmeriCorps.gov. AmeriCorps State and National. Available at: <<https://americorps.gov/serve/fit-finder/ameri-corps-state-national>>

21 AmeriCorps.gov. AmeriCorps VISTA. Available at: <<https://americorps.gov/serve/fit-finder/ameri-corps-vista>>

22 AmeriCorps.gov. AmeriCorps NCCC. Available at: <<https://americorps.gov/serve/fit-finder/ameri-corps-nccc>>

23 Volunteer Louisiana. AmeriCorps Programs. Available at: <<https://volunteerlouisiana.gov/ameri-corps/state-programs>>

24 U.S. Department of Labor. Jobs Corps. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/jobcorps>>



<p><b>Juvenile Accountability Block Grants (JABG) and Formula Grants to States programs:</b><sup>25</sup> A grant program operated by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). JABG provides grants to states for programs that promote greater accountability in the juvenile justice system. In Louisiana, the grant is held by the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement.<sup>26</sup></p>	<p>The Formula Grants program of the OJJDP provides states in compliance with the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act with formula grants to help support state and local delinquency prevention and intervention efforts and juvenile justice system improvements.</p>
<p><b>McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program:</b><sup>27</sup> A program providing grants to state and local education agencies to help ensure that children experiencing homelessness, have equal access to a free and appropriate public education.</p>	
<p><b>The National Guard Youth Challenge Program:</b><sup>28</sup> A voluntary 17-month dropout recovery program that helps at-risk youths earn their high school diploma or GED, funded by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and managed by the National Guard Bureau. The program consists of five months of residential, military-style instruction and training, followed by 12 months of follow-up services, and is cost-free to participants.</p>	<p>NGYCP operates in three Louisiana locations in Camp Minden, Carville and Pineville.</p>
<p><b>Pell Grants:</b><sup>29</sup> Federal aid awarded to undergraduate students who display exceptional financial need and have not earned a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree. The maximum Federal Pell Grant award for 2022-2023 is \$6,495</p>	<p>Pell Grant eligibility and award amount is determined by a combination of four factors: (1) financial need; (2) cost of attendance; (3) full- or part-time status; and (4) intention to attend for a full school year. Financial need is calculated based on the applicant's family's income and expenses, which determine the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). In 2021-2022, an applicant with an EFC of \$5,846 or less would qualify for Pell Grant support.</p>
<p><b>Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program:</b><sup>30</sup> A U.S. Labor Department grant program that supports public workforce agencies on how best to serve formerly incarcerated youth, young adults, and adults ages 14 to 24</p>	
<p><b>Registered Apprenticeships:</b><sup>31</sup> A national certification program to assist businesses, unions, and skilled professionals with apprentices.</p>	<p>The Apprenticeship Louisiana program, administered at the state level by the Louisiana Workforce Commission, can connect applicants to approximately 60 Registered Apprenticeship programs in various traditional and non-traditional industries and has approximately 3,500 apprentices enrolled in registered programs throughout Louisiana as of January 2022.<sup>32</sup></p>
<p><b>Second Chance Act Grant program:</b><sup>33</sup> A grant program that supports state, local, and tribal governments and nonprofit organizations in their work to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for people returning from state and federal prisons, local jails, and juvenile facilities.</p>	<p>Louisiana has been awarded 16 grants totaling \$10 million since 2009, helping to fund, in part, career training and development or reentry for juveniles.</p>

25 Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice. Juvenile Accountability Block Grant Program.

Available at: <<http://www.lcle.la.gov/programs/jabg.asp>>

26 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. List of Funded Projects - Louisiana. Available at: <<https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/funding/awards/list?awardee=Louisiana%20Commission%20on%20Law%20Enforcement>>

27 Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Education for Homeless Children and Youths. Available at: <<https://eese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/education-for-homeless-children-and-youths-grants-for-state-and-local-activities/>>

28 National Guard Youth Challenge. National Guard Youth Program. Available at: <<https://ngchallenge.org/about-us/program/>>

29 Federal Student Aid. Types of Financial Aid: Federal Pell Grants. Available at: <<https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/grants/pell>>

30 U.S. Department of Labor. Reentry Employment Opportunities. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/reentry>>

31 U.S. Department of Labor. Registered Apprenticeship Program. Available at: <<https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/registered-apprenticeship-program>>

32 Louisiana Workforce Commission. Registered Apprenticeship Program. Available at: <<https://apprenticeshipla.com/>>

33 U.S. Department of Labor. Second Chance Grant Program Grantees. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/reentry/grantees>>

<p><b>Service and Conservation Corps:</b><sup>34</sup> Corps programs engage youth between the ages of 16 to 25 and veterans ages 35 and up in service, education, job training, and mentorship. The programs are comprehensive, non-residential youth development programs that engage participants in service projects coupled with job training and academic programming.</p>	<p>Louisiana is home to two programs, the Louisiana Conservation Corps and Limitless Vistas (which is also an AmeriCorps program).<sup>35</sup></p>
<p><b>Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs:</b> WIOA includes a number of programs that assist Opportunity Youth. WIOA programs are explored in depth in the section titled “Management of WIOA Programs in Louisiana.”</p>	
<p><b>YouthBuild:</b><sup>36</sup> A full-time, comprehensive, nonresidential pre-apprenticeship program administered by DOL and implemented by nonprofit and public entities. It is a community-based alternative education program that provides hands-on job training, and educational and community service opportunities for low-income youth ages 16 to 24 who have left high school without a diploma.</p>	<p>Louisiana has YouthBuild programs operating in Baton Rouge, Lacombe, and Houma.<sup>37</sup></p>

STATE PROGRAM	NOTES
<p><b>Go Grant:</b><sup>38</sup> A scholarship program providing need-based financial support for nontraditional and low- to moderate-income students who qualify for Federal Pell Grants and need additional aid to afford the cost of attending college. Awards can range between \$300 and \$3,000 a semester.</p>	<p>For 2021-2022, Louisiana has allocated \$40,480,716 to Go Grants. 45% of students eligible for the Go Grants receive support. In order to offer a maximum award of \$3,000 to the 59,117 eligible students, the state would need to allocate a total of \$132.9 million for the 2022-2023 fiscal year.<sup>39</sup></p>
<p><b>LED FastStart:</b><sup>40</sup> A program by the Louisiana Economic Development department that provides customized employee recruitment, screening, and training for eligible new or expanding companies.</p>	<p>To qualify, a company must commit to creating a minimum of 15 new, permanent jobs for manufacturing or distribution centers or a minimum of 50 new, permanent jobs for digital media, headquarters, research and development, or inbound call center operations.</p>
<p><b>Louisiana JumpStart:</b><sup>41</sup> A high school diploma career-track program that prepares students to enter the workforce with a certification in a high-wage career sector.</p>	

34 The Corps Network. 2019. The Corps Network: Strengthening America through service and conservation. Available at: <[https://corpsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Our-Impact-FY19\\_FINAL.pdf](https://corpsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Our-Impact-FY19_FINAL.pdf)>

35 Limitless Vistas, Inc. Available at: <<https://www.limitlessvistas.org/>>

36 U.S. Department of Labor. YouthBuild. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/youth/youthbuild>>

37 U.S. Department of Labor. YouthBuild Grant Awards - 2021. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/youth/docs/YouthBuild%20PY20%20One-Pager-Grant-Award-Abstracts-%20FINAL.pdf>>

38 Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance. GO Grant. Available at: <<https://mylosfa.la.gov/students-parents/scholarships-grants/go-grant/>>

39 State of Louisiana Board of Regents. 2021. Regents Adopts 2022-2023 Budget Priorities. Available at: <<https://regents.la.gov/regents-adopts-2022-2023-budget-priorities/>>

40 Louisiana Economic Development. LED FastStart. Available at: <<https://www.opportunitylouisiana.com/faststart>>

41 Louisiana Department of Education. All Things Jump Start. Available at: <<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/courses/all-things-jump-start>>

<p><b>M.J. Foster Promise Program:</b><sup>42</sup> A newly created financial aid program available to Louisiana residents 21 or older with family incomes below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level, or who are unemployed or underemployed for at least six months. The awards have no GPA or ACT score requirements although recipients must commit to residing in Louisiana for one year after completion of their degree. Incarcerated individuals and those who have been convicted of a violent crime are prohibited from receiving Foster Promise grants. The Promise Program is Louisiana’s first and only state financial aid program available to and created for students who are not seeking a degree directly after high school.</p>	<p>Student awards are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis up to \$10 million in total awards. The M.J. Foster Promise Program is a “last dollar” program, meaning recipients must complete the FAFSA to determine eligibility for other sources of federal aid, after which M.J. Foster would pay the remaining costs. Recipients are required to complete 20 hours of community service, an internship, or a mentorship annually to maintain the award.</p>
<p><b>Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS):</b><sup>43</sup> State tuition scholarships for academically qualified Louisiana residents who attend a public college or university in Louisiana, a regionally accredited private university, or a community or technical college. TOPS scholarships include TOPS Opportunity, Performance, Honors, and Tech awards.</p>	<p>Value of the TOPS scholarship varies by institution and program, as well as ACT score. In 2021-2022, for two year programs, the award ranges between \$2,618 and \$3,214 per year. For four year undergraduate institutions, between \$4,236.21 and \$7,462.98 per year.<sup>44</sup></p>

BLENDED PROGRAMS	NOTES
<p><b>Adult Education and Literacy programs:</b> Helps adults learn basic skills such as reading, writing, math, English language proficiency, and problem-solving skills needed to be productive workers. State allocations are based on each state’s share of adults who lack a high school diploma or the equivalent who are not enrolled in school. Louisiana’s program is called WorkReady-U.<sup>45</sup></p>	<p>The program engages people ages 16 and up. Funding is distributed to state workforce or education agencies on a formula basis and requires states to provide at least a 25% match to the federal allocation.<sup>46</sup></p>
<p><b>The Rehabilitation Services programs:</b> Assists people with physical or mental disabilities to obtain employment and live more independently through counseling, medical and psychological services, and job training. Funds are distributed to states and territories based on population.</p>	<p>The states must provide a 21.3% match for operations and 50% match for construction projects. Louisiana’s program is called Louisiana Rehabilitative Services.<sup>47</sup></p>
<p><b>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&amp;T) Program:</b><sup>48</sup> A program required of states that administer SNAP benefits, providing workforce training, case management, and supervised job search assistance to SNAP beneficiaries. SNAP E&amp;T utilizes a third-party matching funds model, allowing states to reimburse non-state organizations for programming.</p>	<p>The SNAP E&amp;T program is explored in greater detail in the “Opportunities with SNAP Employment &amp; Training” section of this report.</p>

42 Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance. M.J. Foster Promise Program. Available at: <<https://mylosfa.la.gov/students-parents/scholarships-grants/mjfoster/>>

43 Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance. TOPS (Taylor Opportunity Program for Students). Available at: <<https://mylosfa.la.gov/students-parents/scholarships-grants/tops/>>

44 Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance. TOPS OPH Annual Award Amounts for 2021-22. Available at: <<https://mylosfa.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/Current-Year-TOPS-Funding.pdf>>

45 Louisiana Community and Technical College System. WorkReady-U. Available at: <<https://www.lctcs.edu/workready-u>>

46 The Center for Law and Social Policy. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II: Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. Available at: <<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/documents/toolkit-pdfs/WIOA-Title-II-Adult-Edu.pdf>>

47 Louisiana Workforce Commission. Louisiana Rehabilitation Services. Available at: <[http://www.laworks.net/workforcedev/lrs/lrs\\_main.asp](http://www.laworks.net/workforcedev/lrs/lrs_main.asp)>

48 U.S. Department of Agriculture. What is SNAP E&T? Available at: <<https://snaptoskills.fns.usda.gov/about-snap-skills/what-is-snap-et>>

<p><b>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):</b><sup>49</sup> Opportunity Youth with children may qualify for TANF if they can enroll in secondary school or a workforce-training program operated by the state.<sup>50</sup></p>	<p>Louisiana’s TANF program - FITAP - is explored in greater detail in the “Temporary Assistance for Needy Families in Louisiana” section of this report.</p>
<p><b>Unemployment Insurance:</b> A program jointly financed through federal and state employer payroll taxes and administered by the state Workforce Commission. The Federal Unemployment Tax is used to fund state workforce agencies. The state unemployment tax is used solely for the payment of benefits to eligible unemployed workers. In order to continue to receive UI payments, participants must register for work at a local career center, contact three employers and inquire about job opportunities each week, and if you receive a job offer, you must not refuse.<sup>51</sup> The Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment, or RESEA, program is a state formula grant program to assist individuals receiving UI benefits with reemployment.<sup>52</sup></p>	<p>In Louisiana, beneficiaries can receive a maximum of 26 weeks of benefits in a 12 month period for up to \$275 a week,<sup>53</sup> with a minimum benefit of \$10 per week.<sup>54</sup></p>

### TANF LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN LOUISIANA

Congress created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in 1996 as part of a broad overhaul of the federal safety net. This federal law ended the guarantee of cash assistance for families that qualified based on income, replacing it with an annual federal block grant to states. The TANF program grants states greater discretion in how to distribute and spend money. As a result, state spending on TANF cash assistance declined significantly over time, with Louisiana reaching the smallest proportion of poor children of any state in the nation—only 4 in 100 children living in poverty in 2019.<sup>55</sup>

States are allowed to spend their TANF block grants as they wish, provided their spending meets one of the four goals of the program: (1) “provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;” (2) “end dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;” (3) “prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies;” and (4) “encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.”<sup>56</sup>

Louisiana’s TANF cash assistance program is known as the Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP) and includes numerous eligibility requirements that families in need must meet in order to qualify for cash aid. Many, but not all, of these requirements are federally mandated.<sup>57</sup> Households that receive FITAP must include a child and participants deemed eligible for work must

49 Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. Family Independence Temporary Assistance (FITAP). Available at: <<http://dcfs.la.gov/page/cash-assistance-tanf>>

50 Nicoli, L. T. 2019. Opportunity Youth Receiving TANF. Available at: <<https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/welfare-research/work-supports-and-initiatives/Opportunity-Youth-Receiving-TANF.pdf>>

51 Louisiana Workforce Commission. Eligibility. Available at: <<https://www.louisianaworks.net/hire/vosnet/GSIPub/DocumentView.aspx?enc=6UqHcUZuN6XXIxlG/lj2g==>>

52 U.S. Department of Labor. Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA). Available at: <<https://clear.dol.gov/reemployment-services-and-eligibility-assessments-resea>>

53 Louisiana Workforce Commission. Unemployment Benefits. Available at: <<https://www.louisianaworks.net/hire/vosnet/gsipub/documentView.aspx?enc=edaKph6s68rvulPX2P2I7Q==>>

54 Louisiana Workforce Commission. Frequently Asked Questions From Claimants Concerning Benefits. Available at: <[https://www.laworks.net/faqs/faq\\_ui\\_claimantbenefits.asp#:~:text=The%20minimum%20weekly%20benefit%20amount,you%20during%20your%20base%20period](https://www.laworks.net/faqs/faq_ui_claimantbenefits.asp#:~:text=The%20minimum%20weekly%20benefit%20amount,you%20during%20your%20base%20period)>

55 Pavetti, L. and Safawi, A. 2021. TANF Cash Assistance Helps Families, But Program Is Not the Success Some Claim. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Available at: <<https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-cash-assistance-helps-families-but-program-is-not-the-success>>

56 Administration for Children and Families. About TANF. Available at: <<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/tanf/about>>

57 Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. Family Independence Temporary Assistance (FITAP). Available at: <<http://dcfs.la.gov/page/cash-assistance-tanf>>

participate in the Strategies To Empower People (STEP) program, which is intended to provide participants with work experience and career training, or to connect them to educational opportunities.

To facilitate this, FITAP provides assistance with childcare, transportation, certain medical needs, as well as helping to pay for uniforms, tools, or equipment required for work or training. Recipients also cannot receive more than 24 months of FITAP benefits within a 60-month period, or more than 60 months of FITAP benefits in their lifetime.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, very few low-income families receive Louisiana’s FITAP benefits. While roughly half of all Louisiana children in poverty received cash assistance before TANF, by 2019 only 4 in 100 Louisiana children in poverty received help from FITAP, the lowest proportion in the nation.<sup>59</sup> These declines were largely by design, as the proponents of TANF openly discussed their intention to drive down participation in cash assistance programs and “reduce dependency.”<sup>60</sup> But it does not mean that TANF, and the state administered programs it funds, cannot be and are not currently used to help people.

<b>LOUISIANA 2019</b>			
	TANF & MOE spent	Share of total spending	State Ranking
<b>Basic Assistance</b>	\$17,403,974	9.30%	40
<b>Work Activities</b>	\$34,530,276	18.50%	5
<b>Work Supports &amp; Supportive Services</b>	\$8,407,168	4.50%	10
<b>Childcare</b>	\$10,741,970	5.80%	36
<b>Administration &amp; Systems</b>	\$18,967,043	10.20%	25
<b>Tax Credits</b>	\$11,835,996	6.30%	18
<b>Pre-K &amp; Head Start</b>	\$40,644,145	21.80%	5
<b>Child Welfare</b>	\$19,780,202	10.60%	21
<b>Other</b>	\$24,353,573	13.00%	26
<b>Sum of Core Activities</b>	\$71,083,388	38.10%	37
<b>Total TANF Spending</b>	\$186,664,347	100.0%	30

**Table 2, source:** CBPP, “To Lessen Hardship, States Should Invest More TANF Dollars in Basic Assistance for Families”

Analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has found that, as a percentage of total TANF dollars by state, Louisiana spends more than most states on Pre-K and Head Start programs (5th out of 51), work activities (also 5th nationally), and work supports (10th), and comparatively little on basic assistance (40th) and childcare (36th).<sup>61</sup> These rankings show how Louisiana policymakers have chosen to use TANF on more universal programs - from which the poor may generally benefit - due to the low number of families who qualify for cash assistance.

Louisiana is initiating changes to FITAP that would ensure that recipients are better able to benefit from the program. In January 2022, Louisiana’s Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) more than doubled benefits for FITAP and the related Kinship Care Subsidy Program. The agency will

58 Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. Strategies to Empower People Program (STEP). Available at: <<http://www.dcf.louisiana.gov/page/step>>

59 Shrivastava, A. and Thompson, G. 2022. TANF Cash Assistance Should Reach Millions More Families to Lessen Hardship. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Available at: <<https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-cash-assistance-should-reach-millions-more-families-to-lessen>>

60 Edelman, P. 1997. The Worst Thing Bill Clinton Has Done. The Atlantic. Available at: <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1997/03/the-worst-thing-bill-clinton-has-done/376797/>>

61 Azavedo-McCaffrey, D. and Safawi, A. 2022. To Promote Equity, States Should Invest More TANF Dollars in Basic Assistance. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Available at: <<https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/to-promote-equity-states-should-invest-more-tanf-dollars-in-basic>>



also substantially increase childcare payments, and investments in TANF-funded short term emergency benefits and post FITAP transitional benefits for working families who no longer receive FITAP but continue to experience need.<sup>62, 63</sup> Additionally, Gov. John Bel Edwards will be seeking legislative support to end the 24-month time limit on continuous assistance (allowing TANF eligible families to instead receive cash assistance uninterrupted for up to the federal limit of 60 months in aggregate) during the 2022 legislative session.

These changes will bring Louisiana in closer alignment with states that prioritize using TANF funds for “core” parts of the program - particularly basic assistance and childcare - which can improve conditions for beneficiaries in meaningful ways, whether they are Opportunity Youth with children or those who are members of a FITAP qualifying family.

In addition to increasing direct aid, Louisiana could further help TANF-eligible Opportunity Youth by braiding or blending TANF and WIOA programs - for example, by allowing activities funded by WIOA to fulfill the work and educational requirements for TANF beneficiaries.<sup>64</sup>

The TANF program’s eligibility tests - particularly requirements that recipients be parents - exclude most Opportunity Youth. The program’s work and education requirements, and participation limits based on immigration status and criminal record, also make it hard to access by Opportunity Youth. Changing these rules would require changes to federal law.<sup>65</sup>

## **MANAGEMENT OF WIOA PROGRAMS IN LOUISIANA**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law in 2014, modernized government employment programs and consolidated funding streams, with a particular focus on helping Opportunity Youth.

WIOA programs are mostly managed by entities known as Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). These are regional and local bodies responsible for guiding federal, state, and local funding for workforce development purposes. These boards must include representatives of the local or regional private sector, with spots also reserved for representatives of labor unions and other workforce development stakeholders.<sup>66</sup>

Louisiana has 15 WDBs operating across eight regions. These boards play an important role in administering workforce development programs across the state, including offering direct services (such as job-search assistance), contracting with training providers and overseeing programs financed by WIOA dollars. Boards may also host a Youth Committee or Council to help direct services and funding to youth services, the size and membership of which is determined by each board.

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62 Louisiana Division of Administration. Louisiana Register - September 2021. Sections 1361-1363. Available at: <<https://www.doa.la.gov/media/Oyyotnwa/2109.pdf>>

63 Waguespack, M. 2021. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Department of Children and Family Services - Performance Audit Services issued December 22, 2021. Appendix C. Available at: <[https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/8b3b8d2ff12760d1862587b30083045a/\\$file/0002563ca.pdf?openelement&.7773098](https://app.lla.state.la.us/publicreports.nsf/0/8b3b8d2ff12760d1862587b30083045a/$file/0002563ca.pdf?openelement&.7773098)>

64 Lower-Basch, E. 2016. Young Adults and TANF. The Center for Law and Social Policy. Available at: <<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Young-Adults-and-TANF.pdf>>

65 Jobs for the Future. 2018. Alleviating Poverty for Opportunity Youth. Available at: <[https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/HEA\\_Poverty\\_121918.pdf](https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/HEA_Poverty_121918.pdf)>

66 Code of Federal Regulations. 2022. 20 CFR § 679.320 - Who are the required members of the Local Workforce Development Board? Available at: <<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-20/chapter-V/part-679/subpart-C/section-679.320>>



<b>WORKFORCE INNOVATION OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA) PROGRAMS - LOUISIANA FUNDING BY PROGRAM YEAR (PY)</b>		
<b>Program Description</b>	<b>PY20 Funding</b>	<b>PY21 Funding</b>
<b>The Adult Services program:</b> <sup>67</sup> Provides individualized career and training services to help adult job seekers. Priority is given to low-income, basic-skill deficient individuals and recipients of public assistance. Each state's allotment is based on the state's share of total unemployment, the state's share of unemployed greater than 4.5% and the state's share of economically disadvantaged adults.	\$18,045,995	\$16,359,261
<b>The Dislocated Workers program:</b> <sup>68</sup> Provides training, job search, and other assistance for workers who have been laid off or are about to be laid off as a result of global trade dynamics or transitions in economic sectors. Each state's allotment is based on the state's share of total unemployed, the state's share of excess unemployed, and the state's share of long-term unemployed.	\$20,371,329	\$18,464,174
<b>The Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program:</b> <sup>69</sup> A nationwide labor-exchange program that provides services to both job seekers and employers free of charge, in the form of approximately 2,500 American Job Centers. State allocations are based on the state's share of the civilian labor force and the state's share of total unemployment.	\$8,932,122	\$8,709,267
<b>The Youth Formula program:</b> <sup>70</sup> Serves eligible youth, ages 14 to 24, who face barriers to education, training, and employment. States are required to spend at least 75% of their allotments on out-of-school youth. State allotments are based on the state's share of total unemployment, the state's share of excess unemployed and the state's share of economically disadvantaged youth.	\$18,661,916	\$16,900,060

**Table 3, source:** Program Year data provided by Louisiana Workforce Commission and taken from Federal Register;<sup>71</sup> these funds are allocated annually by “program year” but are typically spent over two-year periods.

The WIOA funds most clearly intended to assist Opportunity Youth are Youth Formula programs, though people 18 and older may also qualify for adult programs and may be co-enrolled in the two programs for additional support. But the Youth Formula, while useful in prioritizing support for disconnected young adults, is governed by policies that are counterproductive to the aim of the program.

To learn how the program is working, LBP surveyed 14 regional workforce program administrators in Louisiana, whose offices deal with WIOA funds, and granted them anonymity so they could be candid about the program's strengths and weaknesses. Four respondents were critical of the federal requirement that a maximum of 25% of Youth Formula funding can be spent on in-school youth. This requirement prevents the boards from reaching at-risk youth before they disconnect. Conversations LBP held with other regional workforce development staff also emphasized this as a significant barrier to more effective programming.

67 U.S. Department of Labor. WIOA Adult Program. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/workforce-investment/adult>>

68 U.S. Department of Labor. WIOA Dislocated Worker Program . Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/workforce-investment/dislocated-workers>>

69 U.S. Department of Labor. Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Results. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/results/wagner-peyser>>

70 U.S. Department of Labor. WIOA Youth Formula Program. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/youth/wioa-formula>>

71 Federal Register. 2021. Program Year (PY) 2021 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Allotments; PY 2021 Wagner-Peyser Act Allotments and PY 2021 Workforce Information Grants. Available at: <<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/04/27/2021-08725/program-year-py-2021-workforce-innovation-and-opportunity-act-wioa-allotments-py-2021-wagner-peyser>>

For Fiscal Year 2020, the 75-25 split required the state to spend about \$14 million of its \$18.6 million responding to disconnection rather than preventing it.

<b>LOUISIANA WIOA YOUTH FORMULA PROGRAMS (FY2020)</b>		
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$18,661,916</b>
Program	Requirements	Minimum / Maximum Spending
Out-of-School Youth <sup>72</sup>	Minimum of 75% of WIOA Youth funding must be spent on OSY	No less than \$13,996,437
In-School Youth <sup>73</sup>	No more than 25% of WIOA Youth funding can be spent on ISY	No more than \$4,665,479
Work Experience	Minimum of 30% must to be used to fund paid or unpaid work experience	No less than \$5,598,575

**Table 4, sources:** Department of Labor, WIOA Youth Program Fact Sheet (July 2020); Louisiana Workforce Commission

This federal formula requirement gives workforce administrators little choice but to focus on responding to disconnection rather than preventing it with their Youth Formula Program dollars. Any changes to this requirement would have to come from Congress.

Additional concerns raised by administrators include:

- Before someone can receive funding through WIOA, the boards have to determine eligibility by answering two questions: (1) are there other resources available to help the person; and (2) do they have the ability to benefit from the training they are requesting support to complete? This can lead to unnecessary delays due to staff shortages and lack of coordination between agencies.

The first determination is required by state policy,<sup>74</sup> which mandates that WIOA funds must be treated as a dollar of “last resort” - meaning that all other sources of funding must be sought before WIOA services can be offered to participants. For example, many boards require applicants to apply for a Pell Grant if they are enrolling in college or technical training. Funding from WIOA can then help to pay the remaining tuition or help with supportive services, but not before confirming that the applicant is not eligible for assistance from any other partner agencies. As a result, if, for example, a WIOA applicant is seeking assistance for childcare while they are attending school with Pell Grant assistance, the board must reach out to all childcare assistance providers, and provide documentation of that outreach, before WIOA assistance can be offered.

The second determination - whether or not the applicant has the ability to benefit - requires significantly more discretion on the part of the staff, who have to determine if the applicant’s goals seem possible based on their background, perceived ability, or academic record. For example, an applicant who asks for help to pursue a career in medicine might be rejected if they are perceived to be functioning at a grade school level.

Twenty percent of Youth Formula funding used in Louisiana must be spent on “work experience

72 Eligibility limited to individuals between 16 and 24 years old who are: not attending any school; a recipient of a secondary school diploma who is low-income and is either: basic skills deficient or an English language learner, formerly incarcerated, homeless, in foster care or who has aged out of the foster care system, pregnant or parenting, an individual with a disability, or low-income and requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

73 Eligibility limited to individuals between 14 and 21 years old who are low-income and: basic skills deficient, an English language learner, formerly incarcerated, homeless, in foster care, pregnant or parenting, an individual with a disability, or requiring additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

74 Louisiana Workforce Commission. Workforce, Working Together: Regulations and Partnerships. Slide 9. Available at: <[https://www.opportunitylouisiana.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/wdb-directors'-association-presentation-to-resiliency-workforce-committee.pdf?sfvrsn=aa2bb05\\_0](https://www.opportunitylouisiana.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/wdb-directors'-association-presentation-to-resiliency-workforce-committee.pdf?sfvrsn=aa2bb05_0)>

activities<sup>75</sup> - which can include matching youth with paid or unpaid work experience, or provide occupational and entrepreneurial skills training or financial literacy education. This is an additional limitation on those funds on top of the requirement to spend at least 75% on out-of-school youth. In general, the inflexibility of the Youth Formula funding has left many WBD staff feeling constrained, as they are unable to offer programs or services that would help keep young adults in school and help them avoid becoming disconnected - or to continue assisting young people who have managed to get back into school but still do not have sufficient resources or support to makes ends meet.

- The boards are not allowed to provide individual training accounts (ITAs) - vouchers to help cover costs for workforce training programs - for students, hindering service to those who register for classes before seeking WIOA services. Currently, if a young person has registered for community and technical college for vocational training before seeking WIOA support, they will be counted as a student and cannot be given ITAs without a special waiver from the federal government. While the state is currently requesting a federal waiver to allow ITAs for in-school youth,<sup>76</sup> WDBs are - for the time being - restricted to using only their 25% allocation for in-school youth for young people in these situations, despite often being no less in need of services.
- The boards don't have enough funding to carry out their legal mandate. The law requires the boards to provide comprehensive workforce centers. There are 53 such centers operating across Louisiana, paid for by the 15 regional boards. They have to be able to serve not only WIOA-eligible youth and workers, but also anyone from the general public seeking basic workforce services. Administrators point out that they don't have the resources to offer competitive salaries, and that the problem has gotten worse over time.

## **OPPORTUNITIES WITH SNAP EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING**

While the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is best known for helping low-income households put food on their tables, states and territories that administer SNAP are also required to operate SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) programs, which create employment and training opportunities for SNAP participants, or provide matching funding to support employment and training programs run by institutions other than the state SNAP agency.<sup>77</sup>

SNAP E&T is intended to provide SNAP recipients with skill building, training, or experience to improve their employment prospects, with the goal of increasing economic independence for and reducing the need for SNAP benefits. The federal government allocates funding that can be used to reimburse program providers for 50% or 100% of their program costs, depending on the type of activity or service they offer. SNAP E&T offers states considerable flexibility in program design and implementation, including in which SNAP participants qualify for the program, whether participation is mandatory or voluntary, what kinds of workforce or training services will be offered, and which organizations will provide those services.

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75 U.S. Department of Labor. WIOA Youth Formula Program. Available at: <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/youth/wioa-formula>>

76 Louisiana Workforce Commission. WIOA Waiver Request. Available at: <[https://www2.laworks.net/Downloads/WIOA/WIOA\\_Waiver\\_Request\\_2021.pdf](https://www2.laworks.net/Downloads/WIOA/WIOA_Waiver_Request_2021.pdf)>

77 U.S. Department of Agriculture. What is SNAP E&T? Available at: <<https://snaptoskills.fns.usda.gov/about-snap-skills/what-is-snap-et>>

## SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (SNAP E&T)

Each state is given a formula-based grant to plan, implement, and operate SNAP E&T services (Louisiana receives more than \$1 million annually)

100% Reimbursable SNAP E&T Activities	50% Reimbursable SNAP E&T Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State and provider expenses for administering SNAP E&amp;T programs, including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• salaries and wages</li> <li>• fringe benefits</li> <li>• travel expenses</li> <li>• operating services</li> <li>• supplies</li> <li>• professional services, and</li> <li>• equipment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Direct program expenses (other than participant reimbursement), including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tuition and fees,</li> <li>• case management / career navigation, and</li> <li>• job development</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The state agency and third-party providers can also request a 50% reimbursement for certain SNAP E&amp;T costs that provide direct support to SNAP E&amp;T participants. For example, if Louisiana allocated \$1 million for childcare assistance for SNAP E&amp;T participants, a federal match would contribute another \$1 million to help E&amp;T participants access childcare while they participate in training. 50% reimbursable expenses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant costs that are “reasonably necessary and directly related” to program participation, including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transportation;</li> <li>• child or dependent care,</li> <li>• equipment and supplies for</li> <li>• training,</li> <li>• books,</li> <li>• uniforms,</li> <li>• licensing fees.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Table 5, source:** USDA, “What is SNAP E&T?”; Louisiana DCFS SNAP Employment & Training Quick Start Guide for Potential Partners<sup>78</sup>

One advantage that SNAP E&T provides to states is its “third-party reimbursement” model, which allows the federal government to reimburse providers for 50% of many expenses, including supportive services for participants, such as transportation and childcare stipends, and 100% of SNAP E&T administrative costs. Louisiana’s SNAP E&T program supports 24 program providers, several of which specifically seek to serve Louisiana’s opportunity youth.<sup>79</sup>

According to DCFS staff, SNAP E&T in Louisiana is somewhat underutilized. Agency leaders are eager to recruit more third-party providers, but DCFS staff raised concerns that third-party providers are not obligated to measure performance and share data for oversight purposes. Requiring greater reporting on the SNAP E&T providers would be useful for state agency staff as well as lawmakers.

Unlike WIOA programs, it is not possible to combine SNAP E&T participation with TANF cash assistance (eligibility for SNAP E&T is conditioned on not receiving TANF cash assistance). As such, SNAP E&T and TANF cash benefits cannot act as complementary programs - despite potentially being able to offer resources to similar populations - unless Congress reforms the programs.

<sup>78</sup> Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. SNAP Employment & Training Quick Start Guide for Potential Partners. Available at: <[http://www.dcf.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/searchable/EconomicStability/SNAP/Louisiana\\_SNAP\\_ET\\_Quick\\_Start\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.dcf.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/searchable/EconomicStability/SNAP/Louisiana_SNAP_ET_Quick_Start_Guide.pdf)>

<sup>79</sup> Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T). Available at: <<http://www.dcf.louisiana.gov/page/snap-et>>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Advocate for state and federal reforms to TANF, WIOA, and SNAP E&T that provide greater flexibility.** Legislative and administrative choices limit each of these programs' abilities to meet the needs of Opportunity Youth. TANF imposes such stringent qualifications that most low-income people cannot receive direct assistance through the program. Advocates should support efforts to ensure that TANF provides more direct cash assistance to low-income people while also pushing Congress to make changes when TANF is reauthorized to allow young people ages 16 to 24 to qualify for cash assistance, in addition to very low-income parents. Congress should also eliminate or ease some requirements (for example, that beneficiaries must be enrolled full-time in school, work a particular number of hours, or complete drug tests) to maximize assistance to low-income families.

For WIOA's Youth Formula program, the federal 75% minimum for Out-of-School Youth and 25% cap on In-School Youth makes it very difficult for state, local, and regional workforce and educational entities to use WIOA funds to intervene and prevent young people from becoming disconnected from both school and the labor force. Adjusting these requirements - or eliminating them and allowing Workforce Development Boards discretion to use these funds as needed - would greatly reduce the challenges in keeping young people in school or finding other ways to keep them connected economically and socially.

And while SNAP E&T is more flexible than either TANF or WIOA, there are legal restrictions against combining these forms of assistance with SNAP E&T. Ideally, SNAP E&T could be braided or used in combination with these other funds that are available to Opportunity Youth and low-income families. Changing federal law to allow braiding of these funding sources would help to enhance the support available to E&T program participants.

- **Adopt or bolster “wrap-around policies” for the state and local governments.** Addressing the needs of Opportunity Youth will require state and local governments to provide more “wrap-around policies.” For instance, while some federal programs can pay for transportation or childcare, that does little good to an Opportunity Youth who lives in a community with no public transportation system or childcare centers.

Wrap-around needs are often considered under safety-net and workforce programs - TANF and SNAP E&T can be used towards transportation costs, and WIOA can be used to pay wages - but reimbursements and cash assistance can only close so many gaps. In Louisiana, for example, most communities lack public transit,<sup>80</sup> high-quality childcare is not universally available or affordable,<sup>81</sup> housing is becoming more expensive; and only 75% of Louisianans have access to broadband Internet.<sup>82, 83</sup>

Resolving these problems - which make disconnection more likely and harder to overcome for young people - requires broader political commitment towards investment in universal public goods and services. While these investments are not specific to Opportunity Youth, they are essential to reconnecting them and putting them on the path to long-term economic prosperity.

- **Ensure that Louisiana is maximizing available funding.** Louisiana needs to ensure that it maximizes

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80 FARE Transit Access Project. 2021. The Time is Now for Investments in Equitable Transit in Louisiana. Available at: <[https://farelouisiana.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/REVISED\\_FAREWhitePaper\\_Dec2021.pdf](https://farelouisiana.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/REVISED_FAREWhitePaper_Dec2021.pdf)>

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all resources that can be made available to Opportunity Youth. While many programs have been outlined in this report, amounts of funding received by the state are not easily accessible publicly or even across state agencies. Consequently, workforce development organizations and advocates have struggled to create a comprehensive picture of all that might be available to ensure the state's workforce development and education systems better serve Opportunity Youth.

In an effort to change that, Gov. John Bel Edwards established the Workforce and Education Subcabinet, with which the Louisiana Budget Project has been involved.<sup>84</sup> A goal of this group is to create a comprehensive funding map of all resources relating to workforce development and educational assistance funding - a goal that this report is in part aimed at furthering. Louisiana should adopt a policy of making all budgetary information, for every level of government and every institution receiving public funds, publicly available and easily accessible online.

- **Implement greater centralized guidance and performance measurement requirements for Louisiana's workforce-related agencies.** One complaint voiced by many state agency staff members was a lack of strong, centralized guidance or requirements for state and local workforce programming. The Workforce and Education Subcabinet could, as a part of its mission in coordinating agencies, also offer recommendations on what these guidelines could be, helping to unify or standardize programs and services and identify gaps and needs.

In addition to providing stronger guidance to agencies, most workforce programs funded or administered by Louisiana would benefit from standardized performance measurement requirements and publishing mandates to make data available to policy and social science researchers. Promoting transparency in how these funds are used and in their outcomes for beneficiaries can help governments, nonprofits, and advocates better understand what policies are working well and where gaps exist in addressing the needs of low-income people and Opportunity Youth.

## CONCLUSIONS

While Opportunity Youth are worthy of special attention from policymakers, the challenges they face are not unique nor are they experienced in a vacuum. Most, if not all, of the problems that disconnected young people in Louisiana face are shared by other vulnerable populations, especially low- and moderate-income families. In many cases, disconnection for young people is tied directly to the challenges faced by their families. A weak and porous social safety net—both in America and in Louisiana—and a lack of investment in public goods and services make it more difficult for low- and moderate-income families and disconnected young people to recover from personal and economic setbacks.

We know how to help people achieve economic stability: by fixing that safety net, investing in public goods and services, and ensuring that policies and programs intended to reconnect people to a job or school actually work for young people and their families.

There are a number of programs, including those explored in detail in this report, that can offer some of that support. But reforms will be necessary to ensure those programs are sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of Louisiana's Opportunity Youth. It will also be necessary to overcome the ideological and political dogmas that informed the creation of programs like TANF. Instead of designing programs that make it more difficult to receive public assistance in order to "discipline" recipients, we must make it easier for people to get the help they need, expanding potential eligibility where possible, streamlining

<sup>84</sup> State of Louisiana Board of Regents. Getting to the Goal: Collaborate. Available at: <<https://masterplan.regents.la.gov/home/collaborate/>>



the processes and procedures that people use to access help through Louisiana's safety net and workforce development programs, and increasing funding and resources accordingly.

Additionally, it will be necessary to go above and beyond cash assistance, workforce development programs, or educational grants and scholarships to fully support the success of Louisiana's Opportunity Youth. If Louisiana wants its young people to succeed, it will also have to provide wrap-around services and infrastructure to lessen the burden on individual young people striving for economic stability. Without sufficient public transportation, adequate childcare, affordable broadband access, many young people will continue to become disconnected despite the best efforts of state and federal programs. Making those critical investments as a society can help close the gaps that too many young people fall into today.

Our social safety net, workforce, and education programs fail many young people and their families. But through fairly simple reforms to broaden eligibility and ease access, increased public investment, and a new political commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable among us - including Opportunity Youth - are cared for in their times of need, the status quo that disconnects so many young people from opportunity can be overturned. We simply have to decide to do it.

#### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

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The Louisiana Budget Project (LBP) monitors and reports on public policy and how it affects Louisiana's low- to moderate-income families. We believe that the lives of Louisianans can be improved through profound change in public policy, brought about by: creating a deeper understanding of the state budget and budget-related issues, looking at the big picture of how the budget impacts citizens, encouraging citizens to be vocal about budget issues that are important to them, and providing insight and leadership to drive the policy debate.

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