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Legal Momentum Releases Important Report on the Impact of the TANF program on Poor Families, Entitled “A TANF Misery Index”

April 10, 2013 – New York, NY – Legal Momentum, the nation’s oldest nonprofit advocating for the legal rights of women in America, today announced the release of a new report on the impact of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF) on poor families.

The report provides a clear, authoritative measure of how well TANF has done in each year since 1996, the year it was enacted, in providing assistance to poor families.

Only a fraction of all families with incomes at or below the official poverty level receive TANF assistance despite their need. And those who do receive benefits actually receive amounts well below the income figures considered as those at the official poverty level.

“This is one of several important reports Legal Momentum has produced in recent months on families living in poverty,” said Elizabeth Grayer, president of Legal Momentum. “Our reports have been widely cited by media outlets and journalists across the country and we are very pleased by the response we have received from policy makers, legislators, and the public.”

The TANF “misery index” is the sum of the percent of poor families not receiving TANF and the percent gap between benefits and the poverty level. The misery index summarizes in a single number how well or badly the program is performing in alleviating family poverty. The higher the index number, the worse TANF is performing in alleviating family poverty.

The TANF misery index has risen from 93 in 1996 to 145 in 2011. The index has increased substantially in every year since TANF’s enactment, except for the year 2011 when it was the same as in 2010.

Legal Momentum was founded in 1970 and has long been one of the country’s leading advocacy organizations fighting for the economic security, personal safety, and equal rights of women and girls. Legal Momentum’s comprehensive analyses of the status of women and families living in poverty have been cited by the New York Times, Forbes, The Nation, Huffington Post, feminist Susan Faludi writing on the CNN Opinion website, and many other print, radio, and online outlets.

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