



**Beyond the Cliff:**  
Analysis and  
Recommendations  
for Addressing the  
Benefits Cliff

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## Executive Summary

The Benefits Cliff is a public policy dynamic that traps individuals in poverty by deterring them from achieving economic mobility through increases in income. Benefits Cliff occur when an individual receives a small increase in earnings and becomes ineligible to receive public assistance benefits for their households. While this occurrence has been observed for some time, there is little information about its impact and how to address it because of the complexities of the public benefit system. Most benefit programs are independently managed by state agencies and there is no coordination between programs, resulting in variation in eligibility and distribution of benefits.

In recent years, organizations, stakeholders, and policymakers have made efforts to address the Benefits Cliff, however, the solutions are diverse in approach and offerings because of the variation in the public benefits system. Additionally, Benefit Cliff solutions - with many early in implementation - have not been analyzed for their impact and measurable data from these programs is limited.

Philadelphia nonprofit, Episcopal Community Services (ECS), wants to lead efforts in the region to address the Benefits Cliff and is looking to launch a local solution. **The purpose of this report is to evaluate existing Benefit Cliff programs to support ECS in the development of a Benefits Cliff program.** This analysis presents key features that should be considered when developing the framework for a Benefits Cliff solution.

Based on a review of literature and policy documents and interviews with Benefit Cliff program managers, the following report identifies key features

of Benefit Cliff solutions and provides recommendations for developing a new program. This analysis will:

- Describe the Benefits Cliff as a growing policy concern, including organizational solutions from across the country.
- Analyze ECS' capacity to address the Benefits Cliff and lead a broader initiative supporting individuals facing the Benefits Cliff in Pennsylvania.
- Make recommendations for launching a Benefits Cliff solution to further position ECS as a leading voice on the issue.

## The Benefits Cliff

The Benefits Cliff is the immediate and often unexpected loss of public benefits due to small increases in income.<sup>1</sup> This dynamic traps individuals in poverty by discouraging them from reaching economic freedom and creating a dependency on public benefit programs to meet essential needs.<sup>2</sup> When individuals are forced to make a decision between utilizing public benefits and pursuing employment/career opportunities, they are also weighing the immediate and long-term implications for their households, career, and financial independence.

The Benefits Cliff has been observed for decades, but is more recently being recognized as a barrier to economic mobility through research conducted by stakeholders and policymakers.<sup>3</sup> Most notably, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta<sup>4</sup> and the National Conference of State Legislatures<sup>5</sup> have prioritized research and policy development on the issue. Their research has uncovered the complexities of the Benefits Cliff and the web of related issues and externalities that surround it. This includes, but is not limited to: the varied

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<sup>1</sup> Chiarenza, Gabriella. The Benefits Cliff, explained, October 5, 2023. <https://fedcommunities.org/the-benefits-cliff-explained/>; “Introduction to Benefits Cliffs and Public Assistance Programs.” National Conference of State Legislatures, November 2023. <https://www.ncsl.org/human-services/introduction-to-benefits-cliffs-and-public-assistance-programs>.

<sup>2</sup> Chiarenza, Gabriella. A hand up, not a handout, to cross the benefits Cliff, April 2, 2024. <https://fedcommunities.org/stories/benefits-cliffs-hand-up-not-handout/>; Navigating Benefits Cliffs – Barriers and Solutions, October 12, 2023. <https://fedcommunities.org/connecting-communities-navigating-benefits-cliffs-barriers-solutions/>.

<sup>3</sup> Altig, David, Elias Ilin, Alexander Ruder, and Ellyn Terry. Benefits Cliffs and the Financial Incentives for Advancement: A Case Study of a Health Care Career, February 2021. <https://www.atlantafed.org/-/media/documents/community-development/publications/discussion-papers/2020/01-benefits-cliffs-and-the-financial-incentives-for-career-advancement-2020-01-31.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Birken, Brittany. Interview with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. Personal, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, “Introduction to Benefits Cliffs and Public Assistance Programs.”

distribution of public benefits that are determined by state agencies, living wages, financial literacy and wellness, and career advancement.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the solutions to address the Benefits Cliff are just as diverse, and they include legislative action (to advocate for changes in the administration of public benefits), increases in financial literacy and wellness, financial management tools, and career advancement/development initiatives.

Through the research conducted in this analysis, I determined that solutions to address the Benefits Cliff can appear in the following two categories (with many organizations and initiatives utilizing both):

- A legislative approach that engages elected officials to advocate for legislation that offers support via funding, a pilot program, or changes to the public benefit program; or
- An independent approach in which an organization leads efforts to implement its own solutions, such as cash assistance, financial literacy, financial management tools, career development, and advocacy.

This analysis continues to identify key features of Benefits Cliff solutions that should be considered during the development of new programs. The findings are intended to demonstrate how a Benefits Cliff program should be developed and are not specific to how the program should operate. The recommendations provided are applicable to stakeholders, policymakers, and organizations who are familiar with the Benefits Cliff and are seeking to launch their own program solution.

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<sup>6</sup> See note 1

## Episcopal Community Services

In 2019, the leadership of Episcopal Community Services (ECS) selected the Benefits Cliff as a lead advocacy issue for the organization, which would prioritize the development of advocacy efforts, funding, and programming to address it. In elevating this topic across the organization, ECS seeks to become a prominent voice in the region and to lead a local effort to address the problem.<sup>7</sup>

Founded in 1870, ECS is dedicated to providing social services and resources to lift Philadelphia families out of poverty. Guided by responsible evolution, ECS's programs are designed to adapt to the needs of the community, while staying true to its mission to challenge and reduce intergenerational poverty. Annually, ECS reaches more than 2,000 individuals and households with programming that includes out-of-school time enrichment, coaching and counseling for career development, financial stability, housing, and health and wellness, a food pantry, and other community resources.<sup>8</sup>

While the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic stalled ECS' Benefits Cliff efforts, it has since regained momentum and deepened its advocacy efforts through stakeholder engagement, including: hosting two educational panel events featuring local and national experts to increase awareness of the issue; briefing State Senator Art Haywood on the local impact of the Benefits Cliff, and implementing a Benefits Cliff calculator in its program offerings (e.g., counseling for career development, financial wellness, and housing).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dunleavy, Caroline. Interview with Episcopal Community Services Advocacy Team. Personal, n.d.

<sup>8</sup> See note 7

<sup>9</sup> See note 7

Additionally, ECS received \$25,000 in funding to launch its own Benefits Cliff pilot program in 2023.<sup>10</sup> With the pilot, ECS anticipates engaging 5-7 individuals who are former or current program participants actively experiencing the Benefits Cliff. Participants will need to apply for the assistance through an ECS coach, specialist, or staff member. Participants will receive financial assistance in the form of gift cards or direct payments and be supported in developing a sustainability plan to handle any future Benefits Cliffs.

ECS is now ready to identify a strategy that will further position the organization as a leading voice on the Benefits Cliff.

## **Methodology**

As ECS considers its next steps in addressing the Benefits Cliff locally, this analysis will provide an overview of Benefits Cliff solutions in other jurisdictions and outline key features of existing programs. The research completed for this analysis identified shared features of existing Benefits Cliff solutions that had potential for replication by ECS.

I used a qualitative approach focusing on reviewing literature and policy documents and conducting interviews with Benefits Cliff program managers. While there has been much academic research on Benefits Cliff and how/why they occur, programmatic efforts to respond to and solve them are more diffuse and have not yet been the subject of significant research.

This variability across programs makes it all the more important to take a comprehensive approach when reviewing Benefits Cliff solutions, looking at

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<sup>10</sup> See note 7



both legislatively-required and independently-led efforts. Furthermore, because solutions for the Benefits Cliff can vary – that is, they may be legislative in expanding limits for a state benefit, or independently-managed through financial counseling – programs that featured monetary assistance were prioritized for review in this analysis. While varied, Benefits Cliff programs that are operational are limited. Programs reviewed for this analysis were selected because their solutions have moved from proposed initiatives to active programs within the last ten years. Additionally, these programs have garnered local media interest and recognition by other stakeholders.

For each of the programs included in this analysis, I reviewed literature and educational materials on the program and its administrators, including media interviews, websites, brochures, and press releases. I also conducted virtual interviews with program managers.

The following programs are included in this analysis (for additional details on the programs reviewed, see Appendix):

- The Cliff Effect pilot, administered by Springfield Works in Massachusetts
- Our ChanceTN, managed by the Tennessee Alliance for Economic Development and its parent-organization, the Martha O' Bryan Center
- Career Mobility Action Plan, administered by the Washington, D.C. Department of Human Services
- Employment Incentive Program, administered by Allen County Department of Jobs and Human Services in Ohio

## Limitations

### One size does not fit all

For public benefit programs not managed by federal agencies, states are individually responsible for administering them, including setting requirements for eligibility, reporting, and income and asset limits. Due to the variability in state-set rules, Benefits Cliff programs vary in how they are administered and provide support to individuals. Programs highlighted in this analysis include features such as cash assistance, skills training, and overall wellness support. ECS should bear this variability in mind as it considers replicating features of programs outlined in this analysis, as there may be Philadelphia- or Pennsylvania-specific issues that need to be addressed.

### Incomplete Findings

Many of the programs highlighted in this analysis are early in implementation and, accordingly, do not yet have a full evaluation of their programs and the results. While these programs have taken first steps in addressing the Benefits Cliff, there is not enough evidence to determine how impactful these solutions are for their target audiences. The highlighted programs should serve as a reference point when thinking through an ECS-led solution and ECS should continue to monitor for published evaluation results.

### Completeness

In my research, I could not find a comprehensive list of Benefits Cliff programs across the country that was inclusive of active and previously implemented efforts, legislative and independently-managed programs, and varying programming solutions (e.g., financial counseling or expanding benefit limits). As this analysis is based on independent research completed

within a limited time frame that focused particularly on programs offering monetary support, there may be Benefits Cliff programs that were overlooked, especially as many are independently-managed by local organizations. For this reason, ECS should continue its research into ongoing programs. Additionally, as policymakers and other stakeholders deepen their understanding of the Benefits Cliff and its impact across multiple topics (workforce development, economic mobility, poverty, etc.) new programs will continue to emerge as potential solutions for consideration by ECS.

## **Market Research: Key Findings**

### **Key finding: Legislative action can be used to advance Benefits Cliff solutions.**

The challenges and complexities of the Benefits Cliff appear to be linked to the uncoordinated delivery and management of public assistance programs, with state agencies responsible for setting eligibility requirements and distributing benefits.<sup>11</sup> As such, Benefits Cliff solutions that have garnered legislative support have gained more traction in implementation. Legislative action can take many forms, including funding for innovative public programs, changing the eligibility requirements for public benefits, research on the Benefits Cliff or related topics, or even support for pilot public programs. Even if the legislation is not specific to the Benefits Cliff, stakeholders can look for related opportunities to engage elected officials on the Benefits Cliff.

Our ChanceTN followed this approach, gaining initial funding for its program through public innovation grants funded through new legislation, the Tennessee Opportunity Act. The bill provided new guidance on how unused

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<sup>11</sup> Chiarenza, Gabriella. A hand up, not a handout, to cross the benefits

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds should be used and included funding for “the planning, implementation, and evaluation of three-year Tennessee opportunity pilot program(s).”<sup>12</sup> Eligible grantees would “create a compelling two-generation plan for increasing economic advancement and family wellbeing.”<sup>13</sup> In this case, the legislative action was not specific to Benefits Cliff, however, it provided a unique opportunity for organizations like the Martha O’ Bryan Center to pursue the topic. The Martha O’ Bryan Center was awarded a planning grant from this legislation, which it used to develop a coalition, the Tennessee Alliance for Economic Mobility (TAEM). It then applied for a larger grant to support its pilot Benefits Cliff program, Our ChanceTN. The group was one of eight selected and was awarded \$25M for implementation.

Springfield Works (under its parent organization the Economic Development Council of Western Mass), by contrast, advocated for legislation that would specifically fund and support a Benefits Cliff pilot

“It’s a government really sort of, broken policy. And we’ll need a government fix.”<sup>14</sup>

Anne Kandilis  
Director of Springfield WORKS

program.<sup>15</sup> Springfield Works drafted stand-alone legislation that was introduced in three legislative sessions. Ultimately, the pilot program was included in a separate, statewide economic development bill. Throughout the

<sup>12</sup> Bill, Tennessee General Assembly § (2021). <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/112/Bill/SB0144.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> See note 12

<sup>14</sup> Collins, Kaelee, and Emma McCorkindale. Broadcast. Massachusetts Cliff Effect Pilot Program Developed for Families above Income Limit for Public Assistance, December 7, 2022. <https://www.wvlp.com/news/local-news/hampden-county/massachusetts-cliff-effect-pilot-program-developed-for-families-above-income-limit-for-public-assistance/>.

<sup>15</sup> Reuter , Hannah. Interview with Springfield Works . Personal, 2024.

legislative process, Springfield Works worked closely with its coalition to engage stakeholders and elected officials to refine the legislation before each session. The final language included in the bill was pulled directly from previous drafts.

**Key finding: Workforce advancement is used as the foundation for Benefits Cliff solutions.**

As organizations consider ways to fill open job positions while also supporting economic mobility, career advancement through workforce development and skills training is a promising pathway. But the Benefits Cliff can interrupt this pathway to higher-earning roles, with the smallest increases in income leaving an individual/household worse off due to the loss of public benefits. <sup>16</sup>

The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta’s research on the Benefits Cliff highlights this dynamic and is part of a larger effort to study low-income families’ financial incentives for career advancement. As the Atlanta Fed explains: “Our argument is not that Benefits Cliff[s] alone explain why few individuals advance up career pathways through credential attainment. Rather, we seek to show that individuals...may face a complex set of financial incentives to advance beyond entry-level positions.”<sup>17</sup>

This analytical framework guides the approach for Ohio’s Benefit Bridge/Employment Incentive Program.<sup>18</sup> The Ohio Department of Jobs and

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<sup>16</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, “Introduction to Benefits Cliffs and Public Assistance Programs.”

<sup>17</sup> Altig et al., “Benefits Cliffs and the Financial Incentives for Advancement: A Case Study of a Health Care Career,” 4.

<sup>18</sup> Patton, Joe. Interview with Ohio Means Jobs Allen County. Personal, 2024.

Family Services administers the state’s public assistance, workforce development, unemployment benefits, and child and adult support services, with offices in each county. In its efforts to engage local potential employers, the Department’s Allen County office heard from companies that were willing to pay higher-wages, but could not find people to hire.<sup>19</sup>

“We have quite a few jobs here in Allen County — about 1,200 to 1,300 is what we’re averaging open — but we have quite a few people on public assistance...We’re trying to bridge that gap to pull people into those jobs and try to incentivize work.”<sup>20</sup>

**Joe Patton**  
**Director, OhioMeansJobs Allen County**

The Employment Incentive Program (EIP) was created in response to discussions between the Allen County office, the County’s Chamber of Commerce, and business leaders

seeking to fill open positions. EIP provides individuals with financial assistance as they pursue and maintain full-time employment and, ultimately, a resultant reduction in or loss of public assistance benefits. Participants are eligible for \$3,000 after completion of financial literacy/wellness training and career development coaching, and have access to emergency funds to support any loss in benefits during their time in the program.<sup>21</sup> Participants complete the 18-month program with a full-time job, \$3,000 in savings, and a plan for self-sufficiency. The Allen County program

<sup>19</sup> Chiarenza, Gabriella. A hand up, not a handout, to cross the benefits

<sup>20</sup> “Allen County Could Test New Welfare Reform Approach.” *LimaOhio.Com*, June 9, 2017. <https://www.limaohio.com/news/2017/06/09/allen-county-could-test-new-welfare-reform-a-pproach/>.

<sup>21</sup> Patton, Joe. Interview with Ohio Means Jobs Allen County. Personal, 2024.

is now the model for a statewide Benefits Cliff program, set to launch in 2024.<sup>22</sup>

Other Benefits Cliff programs – including the Career Mobility Action Plan (Career MAP) in Washington, D.C.; Springfield Works’ Cliff Effect pilot in Massachusetts; and Our ChanceTN in Tennessee – all include workforce development, career counseling, and/or job placement as key features.<sup>23</sup> Notably, each of the sponsoring entities for these programs have career advancement and workforce development strategies embedded into their standard offerings. For many of them, available resources and expertise could be redirected or leveraged to support their efforts to address the Benefits Cliff. In other words, they built upon existing capacity to take on the Benefits Cliff challenge.

**Key finding: Coalition-building strengthens Benefits Cliff solutions by providing a built-in network of ambassadors, potential providers, advocates, and thought leaders.**

The development of coalitions have been key in building support for Benefits Cliff solutions and provide organizations with a network of available resources throughout the advocacy and implementation process. Once engaged, coalitions have the ability to fill the gap for organizations that may have limited resources or expertise, and also can demonstrate the reach of a topic through the shared interests of its members.

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<sup>22</sup> Klemann, Mackenzie. “Allen County’s Model to End the Benefit Cliff Is Expanding in Ohio.” *Lima News*, July 2021. <https://www.yahoo.com/video/allen-countys-model-end-benefit-040100875.html>.

<sup>23</sup> King, Geoff. Interview with Career MAP. Personal, 2024.; Lovecchio, Marielle. Interview with OurChance TN. Personal, 2024.; Reuter, Hannah. Interview with Springfield Works. Personal, 2024.

Springfield Works formed its coalition early in its legislative process as it sought to secure funding to launch the Cliff Effect pilot. Alongside the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council, Springfield Works formed the Economic Pathways MA Coalition in 2021, which focused on “promoting economic advancement for working families and removing income cliffs that keep people from advancing their careers.”<sup>24</sup> The Coalition included elected officials, local employers, community partners, and individuals who had been impacted by a Benefits Cliff.

As an network-based organization, Springfield Works inherently had access to potential partners and stakeholders with whom to form the successful Coalition.<sup>26</sup> Many of its partner organizations, like Baystate

“The Western Massachusetts teamwork involved in this pilot program speaks to its win-win nature.”<sup>25</sup>

Editorial, MassLive

Health, joined the Coalition. Together, the group was driving toward legislation that would help support a pilot program and its advocacy strategy was anchored in spreading awareness of the Benefits Cliff. Members of the Coalition were available for media interviews, or to share their lived experience of the Benefits Cliff. The Coalition worked throughout the legislative process, gathering support across three separate legislative

<sup>24</sup> “About Us.” Economic Pathways Coalition MA. Accessed 2024. <https://economicpathwaysma.org/about>.

<sup>25</sup> Editorials, Republican. “Defeating the ‘Cliff Effect’ Could Resonate Far beyond Springfield .” MassLive, n.d. <https://www.masslive.com/opinion/2022/12/defeating-the-cliff-effect-could-resonate-far-beyond-springfield-editorial.html>

<sup>26</sup> Reuter , Hannah. Interview with Springfield Works . Personal, 2024



sessions. Since the legislation passed, the Coalition has continued to meet regularly to plan for future advocacy efforts, share updates on the pilot program, and learn more about other Benefits Cliff programs.<sup>27</sup>

Our ChanceTN was developed through the Tennessee Alliance for Economic Mobility (TAEM), a coalition managed by parent organization the Martha O'Bryan Center. Initially, a small steering committee was formed to pursue initial funding. Once funding was secured, the group evolved to become TAEM, a "public-private partnership comprised of 32 organizations that has developed an innovative approach to transform Tennessee's safety net and ultimately improve low-income families' economic mobility and wellbeing."<sup>28</sup> The TAEM coalition included community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, government agencies, higher educational institutions, and economic development organizations – many of which would be essential to implementing the pilot program. These partners would help enroll potential participants; provide financial counseling, workforce development and skills training; and/or offer other resources and opportunities.

Within roughly six months, TAEM developed a plan for the pilot program and was awarded a significant implementation grant. In forming TAEM, the Martha O'Bryan Center had direct access to subject matter experts, operational staff, community-based partners, and voices with a shared vision for addressing the Benefits Cliff.

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<sup>27</sup> See note 22

<sup>28</sup> "Martha O'Bryan & TAEM Awarded \$25M to Improve Economic Mobility & Wellbeing in Middle TN." Martha O'Bryan Center, May 5, 2022. Martha O'Bryan Center. <https://marthaobryan.org/martha-obryan-center-taem-awarded-25m-to-improve-economic-mobility-and-wellbeing-in-middle-tennessee/>.

**Key finding: Benefits Cliff pilot programs should include an element of data collection to strengthen further advocacy efforts.**

Many of the programs reviewed in this analysis have incorporated data collection and evaluation in their pilot programs. Doing so can also increase the likelihood of legislative support. For example, the Cliff Effect pilot led by Springfield Works included guidance on data collection and evaluation in the third and final version of its enabling legislation, which helped secure its passage. The Career MAP and Our ChanceTN programs also built in data collection and analysis by structuring their pilots as randomized controlled trials; that is, the group receiving the intervention of the program offerings is assigned at random. Data collected through randomized controlled trials are recognized for removing selection bias and for identifying statistical significance (causality vs. correlation).

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation: Recruit members for a regional Benefits Cliff coalition that will support an advocacy campaign on the Benefits Cliff, a proposed solution, and/or legislative activity.**

Coalitions were used in two of the most recent Benefits Cliff pilot programs, Springfield Works and Our ChanceTN. Even after the pilot programs were launched, these coalitions were maintained to continue advocacy efforts for additional funding or resources. The coalitions formed provide an engaged network of stakeholders, including private and nonprofit organizations, service providers, subject matter experts, state agencies, and other organizations and individuals, unified by the problem of Benefits Cliff and a proposed solution.

ECS should consider forming a coalition ahead of any legislative activity. It could deploy the resources and expertise of coalition members to launch an

advocacy campaign to educate others on Benefits Cliff and push for legislation to support a proposed solution. Coalition members can participate by hosting special events or advocacy days, authoring op-eds/editorials, speaking as subject matter experts, and other efforts as needed.

ECS should consider the following activities to recruit for potential members:

- Coordinate one-on-one meetings with potential coalition members (potential coalition members are included in Appendix B).
- Host an event on the Benefits Cliff, similar to the Forum on Justice and Opportunity.
- Create educational materials, such as a brochure/pamphlet or website, on the Benefits Cliff and ECS' advocacy efforts.
- Publish data on Benefits Cliff pilot and/or data that highlights the impact of the Benefits Cliff.

**Recommendation: Consider using workforce development as the foundation for ECS' Benefits Cliff solutions.**

Many of the programs featured in this analysis, and much of the academic research on the Benefits Cliff, link solutions to workforce development activities. In using this approach, program managers determined that a significant and sustainable increase in wages and total income would provide individuals with the economic mobility needed to end reliance on public assistance. These programs included elements of career advising, skills training, and employer matching. In some cases, program administrators were able to incorporate existing workforce development activities into their Benefits Cliff program. For organizations that did not have workforce development initiatives, program administrators partnered with other organizations and nonprofits to provide services.

ECS should consider using this framework to guide its future Benefits Cliff activities. If workforce development is not directly aligned with ECS' current program offerings, it should consider partnering with organizations that manage workforce development programs. Furthermore, ECS should identify a framework that will guide their Benefits Cliff efforts and dictate their involvement in future activities. As previously mentioned, because of the complexity of the Benefits Cliff, there are many approaches and solutions to the occurrence. For that reason, ECS should find an approach that reflects their organizational mission and offerings, while still making it clear their commitment to addressing the Benefits Cliff.

**Recommendation: Conduct an evaluation of ECS' current Benefits Cliff pilot program to review outcomes and collect data for future advocacy activities.**

Many of the pilot programs reviewed for this report included a plan for program evaluation. In some cases, requirements for evaluations and how they should be completed were included in legislation that supported the Benefits Cliff program. While ECS' Benefits Cliff pilot program was implemented without legislative support and was conducted with a small sample size, ECS staff should still take steps to conduct a program evaluation to collect information on the participants that could be leveraged for future advocacy efforts and Benefits Cliff initiatives.

Because of the complexities and variations in public benefits offerings and how one may experience a Benefits Cliff, it is important for pilot programs to collect data that accurately reflects the experiences of their participants and communities. Even without a one-size-fits-all approach to addressing Benefits Cliff, insights from the evaluation of diverse programmatic

responses to the Benefits Cliff will inform future activities – both for the program under study and for efforts in other places.

In addition to informing program design and implementation, evaluation findings can help inform education and advocacy approaches. For that reason, ECS should also consider conducting a broader survey of current and previous clients to evaluate the need and delivery method for future Benefits Cliff solutions. The data collected can also be leveraged to inform future activities, especially as there is no current database of how many clients may be approaching or are currently experiencing a Benefits Cliff and there is no local or statewide data available (with the understanding that many individuals who are approaching a Benefits Cliff may be unaware of it and that a Benefits Cliff can happen at any time.)

If ECS should decide to collect data from its Benefits Cliff pilot and/or from its clients, ECS should consider the following activities:

- Develop a pre-evaluation plan that identifies key objectives, research questions, sample size, and evaluation methods.
- Review any data ECS has previously collected related to the Benefits Cliff and its existing client to establish a baseline for comparison.
- Engage with an external evaluation partner, such as the University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute of Government or ImpactEd, to design and execute an evaluation plan.

## **Conclusion**

An effective Benefits Cliff solution has the ability to change the lives of thousands of individuals by offering them economic mobility and an opportunity for economic independence. However, the complexity of the Benefits Cliff and the variation in approaches to address it reflects the

challenges that stakeholders and policymakers face in finding a sustainable solution. Additionally, many of the programs reviewed for this analysis are early in implementation and their offerings have not been analyzed for short-term or long-term impact. The right solution to solve this far-reaching problem has not been identified, but there are key features that organizations like ECS should consider when proposing a Benefits Cliff initiative. As new programs emerge, ECS should continue to monitor for program components and activities that they can incorporate into their own plans. The development and implementation of a Benefits Cliff program will take time, and may only result in a temporary (pilot) solution, but the attempt to do so will bring ECS and others closer to finding a viable solution

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Target Organizations and Stakeholders for Greater Philadelphia Benefits Cliff Coalition

Organization/ Stakeholder	Brief Description	Shared Interests	Contacts	Partnership Goals
<b>United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southeastern New Jersey</b>	<p>The United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southeastern New Jersey is committed to ending poverty for all and to expand opportunity through support, advocacy, and funding of initiatives throughout the region.</p>	<p>In 2020, the United Way alongside the City of Philadelphia launched The Promise initiative, which focuses on lifting Philadelphia out of poverty by removing barriers to secure, stabilize, and grow income through grants and partnerships. Additionally, Financial Empowerment is a key pillar of the United Way.</p>	<p><a href="#">Website for The Promise</a></p> <p><a href="#">Website for United Way</a></p> <p>Michael Banks, Executive Director, The Promise, <a href="mailto:mbanks@unitedforimpact.org">mbanks@unitedforimpact.org</a></p> <p>Joanna Maxwell Manager, Economic Mobility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Partner</li> <li>• Resource/Data Sharing</li> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>

<p><b>The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia</b></p>	<p>The Philadelphia Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank System serves the Third District, which includes Delaware, southern New Jersey, and eastern and central Pennsylvania. The Federal Reserve promotes a healthy economy through local research, community development, and education.</p>	<p>The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia has a focus on community development, specializing in inclusive growth and workforce and economic development. Unlike its counterpart in Atlanta, the Federal Reserve of Philadelphia has not explored the impact of the Benefits Cliff.</p>	<p><u><a href="#">Website</a></u></p> <p>Theresa Y. Singleton Senior Vice President and Community Affairs Officer <a href="mailto:theresa.singleton@phil.frb.org">theresa.singleton@phil.frb.org</a></p> <p>(215) 574-6482</p> <p>Erin Mierzwa Assistant Vice President, Strategic Outreach &amp; Engagement <a href="mailto:erin.mierzwa@phil.frb.org">erin.mierzwa@phil.frb.org</a></p> <p>(215) 574-6641</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Partner</li> <li>• Resource/Data Sharing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community College of Philadelphia</b></p>	<p>The City's only public, open admission, associate degree-earning institution.</p>	<p>Students enrolled at the Community College of Philadelphia are often looking to transition careers or to learn additional skills to start or pivot in their careers.</p>	<p><u><a href="#">Website</a></u></p> <p>Dr. David E. Thomas, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Partner</li> <li>• Resource/Data Sharing</li> <li>• Program Recruitment and Outreach</li> <li>• Audience Engagement</li> </ul>



<b>Philadelphia Works</b>	A nonprofit and Philadelphia's workforce development board, Philadelphia Works manages innovative solutions to support a thriving workforce in Philadelphia.	Philadelphia's leading workforce development agency offering training, apprenticeships, and partnerships with industries across the region.	<a href="#">Website</a>  Patricia Blumenauer Chief Operating Officer <a href="mailto:Pblumenauer@Philaworks.Org">Pblumenauer@Philaworks.Org</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Partner</li> <li>• Resource/Data Sharing</li> <li>• Program Recruitment and Outreach</li> <li>• Audience Engagement</li> </ul>
<b>The Philadelphia Housing Development Corp (PHDC)</b>	A private nonprofit that supports the City's housing and redevelopment goals through the management of the Philadelphia Land Bank and the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority.	Manages PHL Housing+, a guaranteed income program to support individuals on the waitlist for public housing and HUD vouchers.	<a href="#">Website</a>  <a href="mailto:PHLHousingPlus@phila.gov">PHLHousingPlus@phila.gov</a>  Shelvia Williams Community Engagement Officer Executive Office <a href="mailto:Shelvia.Williams@phdc.phila.gov">Shelvia.Williams@phdc.phila.gov</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Partner</li> <li>• Resource/Data Sharing</li> <li>• Program Recruitment and Outreach</li> <li>• Audience Engagement</li> </ul>

<b>Benefits Data Trust</b>	Benefits Data Trust is a nonprofit organization based in Philadelphia that works to connect households to public benefit programs.	In addition to directly engaging with individuals who are eligible for public benefits, Benefits Data Trust also works to conduct research that informs policy and state agencies.	<a href="#">Website</a>  Nijah Newton-Famous Associate Director of Partnerships (Pennsylvania)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Partner</li> <li>• Resource/Data Sharing Program</li> <li>• Recruitment and Outreach</li> <li>• Audience Engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Clarifi</b>	Clarifi is the region’s largest provider of financial wellness and housing services for low- and moderate-income individuals.	Clarifi combines its financial counseling services with direct cash assistance to support families in need.	<a href="#">Website</a>  Jill Roberts, Director of Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Partner</li> <li>• Resource/Data Sharing Program</li> <li>• Recruitment and Outreach</li> <li>• Audience Engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Philadelphia Foundation</b>	A community foundation committed to improving the quality of life in Philadelphia through funding (grants, resources, scholarships) thought leadership, and partnership.	Awarded ECS with funding to support its Benefits Cliff pilot program	<a href="#">Website</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>
<b>Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta</b>	Democrat, 181st District (Philadelphia)	Introduced in 2024 <a href="#">House Resolution 384</a>	<a href="#">Website</a>  P: (215)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative Action</li> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>

	County)	directing the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a study and issue a report on benefits cliffs in this Commonwealth .	978-0311 P: (717) 787-9471	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data/Resource Sharing</li> </ul>
<b>Senator Art Haywood</b>	Democrat, District 4 (Philadelphia and Montgomery Counties)	Existing relationship with ECS and is aware of advocacy work on the Benefits Cliff. Minority Chair, Health & Human Services Committee	<a href="#">Website</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative Action</li> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Data/Resource Sharing</li> </ul>
<b>Nicolas O'Rourke, Councilmember At-large</b>	Minority Whip, Working Families Party; newly elected member of City Council	Introduced in 2024 <a href="#">Resolution No. 240113</a> to hold hearings on the ongoing guaranteed income pilots for potential expansion.	<a href="#">Website</a>  Cade Underwood Director of Legislation & Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative Action</li> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Data/Resource Sharing</li> </ul>
<b>Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity</b>	A city department that promotes and advocates for financial empowerment and stability among other things for	This department currently manages the City's guaranteed income pilot, <a href="#">Guaranteed Resources</a>	<a href="#">Website</a>  William Hall Deputy Executive Director for Policy and Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought Partner</li> <li>• Resource/Data Sharing</li> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>

	Philadelphia residents.	<a href="#">Optimize Wellbeing (GROW)</a> pilot-study and convenes a <a href="#">Benefits Access Working Group (BAWG)</a> .	(215) 685-3614 william.hall@phila.gov	
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## Appendix B: Overview of Benefits Cliff Programs Reviewed

Program	Program Manager	State	County/ Municipality/ City	Manager Type	Coalition?	Legislation?	Program Duration	Overall Program Goals/ Description	Program Features
<a href="#">Cliff Effect Pilot</a>	Springfield Works	MA	Springfield, Worcester, Boston	Nonprofit	Yes	Yes; H.5374 <a href="https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H5374">https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H5374</a>  Previous iterations*	Tentatively 2024-2027	\$1M pilot program for 100 families across 3 years	Cash assistance  Financial counseling  Career coaching
<a href="#">Career Mobility Action Plan</a>	D.C. Department of Human Services		Washington D.C.	State agency	No	No - received funding as an initiative of the Mayor.	2022-2027	Targeting 600 families over five years	Cash assistance  Rental/housing assistance  Financial counseling  Career coaching
<a href="#">Our Chance TN</a>	Tennessee Alliance for Economic Mobility/Martha	TN	Multiple counties in middle TN	Nonprofit coalition	Yes	Yes - TANF Opportunity Act (SB 144) <a href="https://www">https://www</a>	2022-2025	A randomized control pilot program across 3	Individual coach  Financial and family



<a href="#">Employment Incentive Program</a>	Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services	OH	Allen County	State Agency	Yes	No - but pilot has inspired statewide bill for a similar program	2017 - current	The Employment Incentive Program (EIP) assists qualifying Allen County residents achieve self-sufficiency by providing tiered financial incentives to those experiencing a reduction in their public assistance benefits.	Cash assistance Career counseling Financial counseling
<a href="#">2Gen Onondaga</a>	Onondaga County Department of Social Services Economic Security	NY	Onondaga County	State agency	No	Yes - additional funding support to County department	Launched in 2022; three to five years depending on funding	A randomized controlled pilot, 2Gen Onondaga will work directly with parents under the age of 25 that are on temporary assistance	Cash assistance Family and career counseling

								by providing support to the "five areas of family wellbeing."	
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