



Connecticut Two-Generational (2Gen) Initiative

Report to the Connecticut General Assembly, Pursuant to C.G.S. [Sec. 17b-112l](#)

December 2021

Connecticut's [2Gen Initiative](#), structured as an advisory board with policy work groups, represents a diverse collaborative of executive, legislative, and judicial branch leaders; nonprofit and private sector partners; and parent leaders. Members of the legislature chair the Advisory Board and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) serves as coordinating agency of the Initiative. This is the Two-Generational Initiative report to the legislature on progress made in improving policies, programs, and strategies that improve economic mobility for parents and caregivers and healthy outcomes for children. Despite the continued pandemic crisis, the 2Gen work advanced in key areas.

Coordination

The state's 2Gen Coordinator, Rosa Rada, left her position in late July; a team of consultants and state agency staff at OEC and OPM coordinated her work in the interim. While a search for a permanent position continues, OEC is working to develop an interim solution to maintain continuity and focus on cross-agency strategies in policy and program, and a strong relationship with the General Assembly through the leadership of the 2Gen Advisory Board.

Parent Engagement

As required by C.G.S. [Sec. 17b-112l](#), 25% of the members of the 2Gen Advisory Board are parent leaders with lived experience of poverty. These parents received training on the 2Gen Initiative, state government, and legislative process, and now participate as equal members in high-level policy discussions. All parents are compensated for their engagement. Parent perspectives have firmly grounded discussions of systems issues, drawing on their practical experience in aspects of government and nonprofit support systems they have lived. In important ways, parental insights have expanded the Advisory Board's collective knowledge of what works and has not worked to inform proposals. Additional trainings offered to parent representatives are designed to support expanding their knowledge of the complex, layers of issues involved to enhance their leadership.

In summer 2021, parents received additional training through a three-day 2Gen Parent Academy, co-designed and developed by 2Gen parents. Parents were involved in all aspects of the 2Gen benefits cliffs [CT CLIFF](#) study and policy analysis with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta (Atlanta Fed). In July 2021, parents received training in research methods and assisted in the University of Connecticut (UConn) evaluation of the CT CLIFF study by conducting key informant interviews.

Two of the parents were elevated in leadership positions, now serving as co-chairs of two of the work groups. Through a partnership with the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS), parent leaders are now poised to serve on the Governor’s Workforce Council (GWC) subcommittees. Additional parent leadership activity included two parents working as consultants on the benefits cliff pilot evaluation conducted by UConn; and parent leaders spoke on panels at the Whole Family Approach to Jobs regional convening. Finally, 2Gen, in partnership with Working Cities Challenge, the Workforce Affinity Group of the CT Council for Philanthropy, and others, has also intentionally focused on elevating parent voice in other contexts, resulting in the creation of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Community engagement group of the GWC.

In fall 2021, more than a dozen parents worked with The Commission for Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity and the regional Administration for Children and Families to conduct outreach to families who had not yet enrolled in the Child Tax Credit benefit passed by Congress. Parents, including many already engaged in 2Gen work, reached out and enrolled new families who otherwise would not have benefitted from the federal benefit.

Over the past seven years, the Connecticut 2Gen Initiative has established a respected framework and infrastructure for parent engagement in state government. 2Gen parents were involved in the design and development of the OEC Parent Cabinet, which launched in November 2021. The 2Gen model informed the development of a Resident Advisory Board for the [Preschool through 20 Workforce Information Network \(P20WIN\)](#). 2Gen will also provide parent voice in the development of the state’s centralized benefits platform.

As a result of this work, Connecticut’s 2Gen parents are leading other states and offering their expertise to the federal government in elevating the importance of parent voice. Parents are leading a New England learning community on parent engagement, and participated in panels on parent voice for the Administration for Children and Families and the American Public Human Services Association.

Benefits Cliffs

The 2Gen Benefits Cliffs Work Group, formed in June 2019, has led statewide efforts to address [benefits cliffs](#) through data collection and analysis and development of policy solutions. These efforts have made Connecticut a national leader in this work. The 2Gen work group is providing support and guidance to other states as they pursue similar direction. Below are the major milestones from these efforts.

In summer 2020, the 2Gen work group in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta (Atlanta Fed) created – at no cost to Connecticut – Connecticut’s Career Ladder Identifier and Financial Forecaster (CLIFF). The [CT CLIFF](#) tool illustrates the interaction between wages, public benefits, and tax credits in bringing (or failing to bring) families to economic stability. The CT CLIFF tool also demonstrates the significant taxpayer savings that result from career advancement.

To understand how the CT CLIFF tool might be utilized by coaches and case managers in both public and private programs, the Work Group launched a pilot. The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta trained staff on the use of the tool and each participating organization worked with at least

15 parents. From April to July 2021, the 2Gen work group beta-tested use of the CT CLIFF tool at four sites in Connecticut, including an early childhood education center, high school, and two American Job Centers. UConn conducted the evaluation and published promising results in December, informing a broader adoption of the tool statewide.

Based on the pilot results, the 2Gen work group identified additional platforms and programs which would benefit from access to the tool, and identified possible places to house the tool. The Office of Workforce Services and 2Gen staff are working to identify options to train workforce staff, community action agencies, parent resource centers, state agency direct services staff, and others in use of the tool; the “home” for the tool will be determined by early 2022. It is anticipated that by the end of 2022, the CT CLIFF tool will be socialized across Connecticut, offering parents a clearer path to economic mobility.

In addition, the Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank, in partnership with the 2Gen work group and the Governor’s Workforce Council, simulated four state policy options to mitigating the cliff effect. By using the CT CLIFF tool and the [Policy Rules Database](#), the Atlanta Fed was able to simulate state policy proposals along family type, public benefits package, career pathway, and region.

These simulations represent a culmination of several years of research and collaborative decision-making by the 2Gen work group and their many partners. Program experts were consulted at length to provide insight on what would be viable and effective in each program. Policies simulated include changes to cash assistance, housing, child care, and tax credits. Based on this simulation, the state’s housing agency is exploring policy changes in the state housing program to support improved economic mobility for young adults and parents through exclusion of some earnings during transitions. There is additional interest in increasing the eligibility thresholds for TANF; while not a benefit cliff per se, the eligibility thresholds are so low that it limits families’ ability to benefit from that assistance while they pursue education and training that can set them on a path to a career with good wages.

Workforce

In summer 2021, the Governor signed into law changes in Public Act Number 21-2 to the state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that include elimination of the “family cap” and, beginning in Fiscal Year 2024, requiring benefit increases to be provided in years when the program lapses funds, if certain conditions are met. The 2Gen Workforce Work Group played a role in recommending these changes. The work group will continue to focus on changes to TANF still needed to improve opportunity for families, particularly the lengthening of the time limit to 60 months (the allowable federal time limit, CT limit is 21 months, ranking 49th out of 50 states). The work group also worked with state agency partners to implement administrative changes to the jobs element of the program, including but not limited to private vehicle transportation for those in training and employment.

Public Act 21-2, Section 204, June Special Session requires that by January 1, 2022, the Chief Workforce Officer shall submit state workforce strategy recommendations to the Governor, advised by the 2Gen Advisory Board. The 2Gen Workforce Work Group and the 2Gen Advisory Board are

supporting this recommendation process to inform a statewide workforce plan that supports families, submitting their final recommendations in December 2021.

In fall 2021, the 2Gen Workforce Work Group began focusing on family needs related to transportation, primarily elevated by parents in the work group as a critical 2Gen priority. The work group has already weighed in that the CT Pass program needs to meet the needs of parents who need transportation, not only to training but also to drop off children at child care and to encourage participation in the program by including children riding for free. The Work Group is coordinating with the GWC's Equity and Access Committee, and expects to focus on expanding the Eastern Connecticut Rides for Jobs program to other regions, exploring partnering with employers on van pools and/or Uber/Lyft rides, and on flexible loan programs to support purchase of reliable transportation. For each of these, the Work Group expects to focus not only on parents moving to work, but also on how these strategies support parents in getting children to child care, to school, and in solving overall transportation issues that are limiting access for parents to needed services, goods, and jobs.

Regional and Federal Partnership

Connecticut is an active member of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) [Whole Family Approach to Jobs](#) public-private partnership across the six New England states. Connecticut participated in biweekly Whole Family Approach to Jobs calls through the duration of the pandemic and sent delegates to the annual virtual conferences in spring and fall 2021. Connecticut contributed to the ACF publication, [COVID-19 the Family, State and Federal Policy: Lessons Learned in New England](#) that was used nationally and informed the new staff of the Biden Administration.

Connecticut is participating in the regional work groups on racial equity and parent engagement that launched in fall 2021. These regional work groups will enable Connecticut to bring a 2Gen lens to work across agencies and offer key lessons and insights from other states engaged in similar work.