Eliminate the Shelter Penalty

In Washington state, participants of state assistance programs are penalized for having shelter

Safe, reliable shelter is a human right. But participants of Washington state's safety net programs -- such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) -- who have access to a no-cost housing arrangement find that their monthly cash grants are slashed as a result of a shelter penalty imposed by the state's Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS).

Low-income families with children, and low-income adults with disabilities receive a "supplied shelter grant" if they have shelter or housing. These benefits are far lower than the regular monthly cash benefits than they would otherwise receive.

For example, a disabled adult receiving a supplied shelter grant through ABD would receive:

- $120 a month
- $4 a day

A family of three receiving a supplied shelter grant through TANF would receive:

- $345 a month
- $11.50 a day

Which state assistance programs penalize participants for having shelter?

The majority of Washington state's safety net programs offer a supplied shelter grant (or a "Shelter Penalty") to those who have access to no-cost shelter. This shelter penalty affects both adults and children.

Programs that assist families with children:


Programs that assist low-income adults:

- Aged Blind, or Disabled (ABD): Maximum cash grant: $197/month. Maximum supplied shelter cash grant: $120/month


The Shelter Penalty unfairly harms people already struggling to make ends meet

Low-income children and adults should not be penalized for having access to shelter. Receiving a lower grant amount harms families and individuals who are already struggling to make ends meet and achieve economic stability.

Recipients use their monthly grant to buy a variety of essential items for themselves, and their families, such as:

- bus fares for medical appointments
- essential hygiene supplies like diapers, pads, or tampons
- supplies to care for their health and well-being

A reduced grant means that program participants have less money to meet their or their children's basic needs.

Lawmakers must act to eliminate the Shelter Penalty and give much-needed support to low-income families and adults

The cost of eliminating the Shelter Penalty from all five programs and allowing all current recipients to receive a standard monthly cash grant is $2.5 million, plus $1.5 million from the state's federal appropriation.