

# Benefit Cliff Mitigation in MASSACHUSETTS

## THE SPARK

The initiative to address benefit cliffs in Massachusetts was sparked by employers contacting Governor Baker's office, reporting that employees were declining job offers, promotions, and additional hours due to the risk of losing benefits. This prompted the Governor to initiate efforts to address benefit cliffs, recognizing the significant barrier they pose to workforce participation and economic stability for families.

## INITIATIVES

### Learn to Earn (LTE) Steering Committee

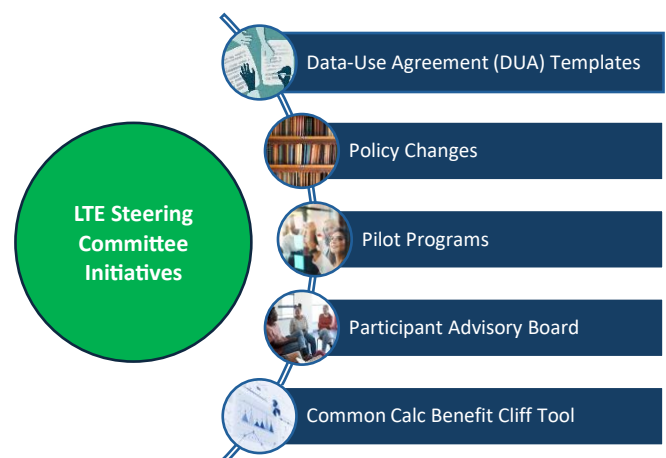
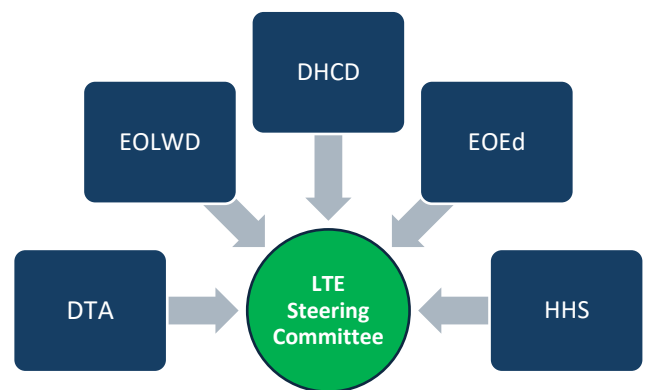
In 2018, the LTE Steering Committee was established to tackle benefit cliffs and improve workforce system efficiencies. This committee included representatives from various state agencies such as the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Executive Office of Education, Department of Housing and Community Development, and Health and Human Services. The committee focused on research and data sharing, developing a data use agreement (DUA) to facilitate cross-agency data sharing. This led to the creation of dashboards to analyze benefit bundling and cliff effects.

### LTE Projects: From Policy Changes to Pilot Programs

The LTE Steering Committee advised several policy changes, including the implementation of a 100% earned income disregard for TANF cases, increasing TANF eligibility to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), making training stipends non-countable income across multiple programs, and eliminating asset limits for the TANF program. Additionally, community agency grants funded pilot programs through state appropriations to test models for sustainable employment and inform policy changes. The Common Calc tool was developed to help case managers and families understand the impact of earned income disregard on other benefits.

### MA Lesson Learned

Bay Staters receiving federal benefits are making *rational decisions* for their families.



## FINER DETAILS

### Funding

The primary funding source for LTE initiatives and pilot programs was state appropriations. Additional support came from philanthropic foundations like John T. Gorman and Hogan Foundation, particularly for consulting and flexible funding needs.

### Key Collaborators

Key collaborators included UMass Boston, which provided research and mapping of benefit cliffs; Mathematica, which supported human-centered design and policy-making processes; the ACF Region 1 Whole Family Approach to Jobs Initiative, which regularly convened New England States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut with ACF leaders and other organizations to develop tools and share best practices; and the Commonwealth Corporation, which managed workforce grants and funding.

## TIMELINE

This work didn't happen overnight! In fact, the state advanced the foundations for this body of work over a four-year period and has since been maintaining various projects for the last five years.

