



## DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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**Virginia T. Lodge, Commissioner**  
**Ed Lake, Deputy Commissioner**

The mission of the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) is to provide an effective system of human services to assist disadvantaged Tennesseans, enabling them to achieve self-sufficiency.

Each month, DHS provides opportunities and services to almost one million people striving for a better quality of life. Approximately 5,200 state employees administer more than twenty different types of services throughout Tennessee. With 133 office locations, DHS is one of the few state agencies with offices in all ninety-five counties.

### History

When Tennessee became a state in 1796, the administration of “poor relief” became a county duty and was placed in a court system which extended into the most remote sections of each county. In 1827, new legislation allowed the counties to establish almshouses to provide for the poor and any other persons who could not care for themselves because of disability or incompetence.

In 1925, the Welfare Division in the state Department of Institutions was created. The Tennessee State Relief Administration was organized in 1933 and later changed into the Tennessee Welfare Commission. It further evolved into the Department of Institutions and Public Welfare and then the Department of Public Welfare. In May 1975, the agency’s name changed to the Department of Human Services.

In September 1996, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, created through the Social Security Act of 1935, was replaced with a new federal welfare reform program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Tennessee’s TANF program is called Families First.

In June 2000, the state’s Child Care Reform Bill was signed into law. Aimed at improving the health and safety of children and the quality of child care programs, reforms include lower adult/child ratios at child care centers and mandatory criminal background checks for operators, employees, and others involved with facilities.

In July 2002, DHS became the state agency responsible for determining TennCare eligibility. In January 2005, the department created a new division of Appeals and Hearings and began hearing TennCare eligibility appeals. In addition, this division handles appeals for other Family Assistance programs, Child Support and Vocational Rehabilitation.

In November 2004, the first Family Assistance Service Center began operations. The Service Centers are a network of three service centers—one in each grand division of the state—that take calls from individuals enrolled in the TennCare/Medicaid, Food Stamp and Families First programs. Each center employs an average of 70 workers, primarily eligibility counselors, who assist clients with questions on their cases, make changes to cases and set up appointments with counselors in the county offices. Average call volume for the network ranges from 4,000 to 8,000 calls a day.

## Services

***Adult and Family Services*** — The Adult and Family Services division provides public assistance to low-income citizens directly through the county DHS offices and indirectly through contracts with social services agencies across the state. This division also includes sections responsible for protecting vulnerable adults and for regulating child care and adult day care agencies.

***Food Stamp Program.*** This program helps low-income families buy the food they need to maintain good health. DHS staff determines eligibility of applicants based on guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Tennessee has an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system for dispensing food stamps and Families First benefits.

***Families First.*** This is the Department's TANF program. Families First helps families gain independence from welfare by helping them enter or re-enter the work force by providing education, job training, employment activities, transportation, child care assistance, and other support services. Temporary cash assistance is also provided to families with dependent children when at least one parent is incapacitated, unemployed, dead, or absent from the home, and the family is unable to pay for essential living expenses.

***TennCare/Medicaid.*** DHS Family Assistance counselors determine eligibility for TennCare/Medicaid, the state's medical assistance program for families with children, elderly and/or disabled citizens.

***Child and Adult Care Services.*** This section oversees the licensing of child care centers, family child care homes, group child care homes and adult day care centers. It works with communities to develop new child care resources, provide training and technical assistance to child care providers, and provide child care resources and referral information to consumers.

***Adult Protective Services.*** This section investigates reports of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of adults who are mentally or physically impaired, or incapable of self-care. Services are provided to protect these adults and to assist them in obtaining care and services.

***Community Contract Services.*** This program negotiates contracts with private and nonprofit agencies for social services that supplement those provided directly by DHS. It administers the state's Community Services and Social Services Block Grant programs, Child Care Food program, Refugee Assistance, Low Income Energy Assistance, Weatherization, Emergency Shelter Grants, and Summer Food Service programs, as well as the Child Care and Development Fund.

**Child Support Services** — The Child Support Services division provides free assistance to families who need help in obtaining and collecting support for their children. This assistance includes locating absent parents, determining paternity, establishing or enforcing court-ordered child support, and distributing support payments.

DHS has numerous enforcement tools at its disposal to collect current and overdue child support. Some of these methods include Automatic Wage Withholding, Financial Institution Data Matches, License Revocation, Treasury/Administrative Offset (interception of IRS tax refunds) and Passport Denial.

**Rehabilitation Services** — This division provides a wide range of services to Tennesseans with disabilities through the following programs:

*Vocational Rehabilitation Services.* These services include diagnosis, counseling, physical therapy, medical and surgical treatment, education and vocational training, job placement, and follow-up.

*Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired.* This section offers four specialized programs for visually impaired individuals, including Rehabilitation Services, Tennessee Business Enterprises, Rehabilitation Teaching Services, and Register of the Blind.

*Tennessee Rehabilitation Facilities.* This program is comprised of the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna, the state's only comprehensive residential vocational rehabilitation center, and 17 community rehabilitation centers for individuals with disabilities in rural communities. Day services are provided in the community rehabilitation centers.

*Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.* The council coordinates communication, information, personal counseling, public awareness, and advocacy services for deaf or hard of hearing citizens through six regional community service centers.

*Tennessee Technology Access Project (TTAP).* This program provides Tennesseans who have a disability and their families with timely, comprehensive information about assistive technology devices and related services. TTAP also provides funding to five assistive technology centers located in Memphis, Jackson, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville.

*Disability Determination Services (DDS).* This program processes Social Security disability insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applications for the Social Security Administration. DDS is fully funded by the Social Security Administration.

**Appeals & Hearings** — This division receives appeals and conducts fair hearings for applicants and clients who believe they did not receive the services and/or benefits from the Department of Human Services to which they are entitled. The division handles appeals for all programs administered by the Department of Human Services, including eligibility for TennCare/Medicaid, Food Stamps, Families First, Child Support and Vocational Rehabilitation cases. The Division of Appeals and Hearings strives to timely resolve appeals while ensuring due process and maintaining the highest quality of communication possible.

***Administrative Support Services*** — Administrative support is provided to the various divisions of the Department through the following sections:

***Finance*** This section prepares the annual departmental budget submission, processes contractor/vendor payments, prepares federal expenditure reports, provides contract technical assistance, performs ongoing fiscal analysis, and monitors federal programs for cash management.

***Information Systems***. This section oversees analysis, design, development, and maintenance of DHS computer-based systems, as well as computer hardware installation and maintenance.

***Office Services***. In addition to managing the purchase, lease, and/or rental of equipment and services, this area is responsible for inventory, printing, telephones, office space, and mail services.

***Personnel***. This section manages recruitment and placement, insurance, classification/compensation, and leave and attendance. Staff provides interpretation and guidance regarding civil service rules and regulations as they relate to performance evaluation, the disciplinary process, Americans with Disabilities Act, and grievance procedures.

***Communications Office***. This office coordinates the agency's public information and public relations efforts and responds to media requests.

***Office of the General Counsel***. This office provides legal advice to DHS programs, legal representation in judicial and administrative litigation affecting the department, prepares departmental rules, and prepares legislation for and analysis of legislation affecting the Department.

***Office of Inspector General***. The Office of Inspector General includes oversight of Program Review, Internal Audit, and Quality Control Investigations. By combining these sections, DHS is ensuring greater integrity and accountability within the Department. This division conducts compliance and quality control reviews of DHS programs, investigates referrals of (possible) fraud and abuse in the programs, handles adjudication and process collections of claims overpayment, and conducts internal audits and investigations for the department.

**Commissioner Virginia T. Lodge**

Tennessee Department of Human Services

**Virginia T. Lodge** was appointed Commissioner of the Department of Human Services in January 2003. Originally from Annapolis, Maryland, Commissioner Lodge has been a Tennessean since 1978. She has a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Hawaii, a master's degree in English Literature from the University of San Francisco and a master's degree in business administration from Vanderbilt University. Commissioner Lodge is active in community and nonprofit organizations. She currently serves on the board of the Metro Nashville Public Library. She is a past board member of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (now National Conference for Community and Justice).

