

B21-0515 – The DC Public Assistance Amendment Act of 2015

Reform DC's TANF program to put it in line with 44 other states To protect our children and help their parents succeed

DC Families Continue to Struggle

DC can be a tough place for our poorest children and parents who have been left behind by the recent economic recovery. Too many of our families are still struggling to put food on the table and to keep the lights on, especially in Wards 7 and 8:

- 1 in 4 DC children are living in poverty – that's approximately \$24,000 a year for a family of four¹ – and that figure is closer to 1 in 2 children in Wards 7 and 8.²
- We have rising numbers of families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Among DC's lowest income residents, 64 percent devote half or more of their income to housing.³
- DC is losing low-cost housing units - the number of apartments renting for less than \$800 a month fell from almost 60,000 in 2002 to 33,000 in 2013.⁴
- Nearly 20 percent of DC residents without a high school diploma, and 18 percent of residents with a high school diploma, are unemployed.⁵

TANF is a Lifeline for Kids

The TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program ensures that despite the economic hardships their parents face, our kids can have their most basic needs met no matter what. It's not only the right thing to do, it also means our children go to school ready to learn and improves their chances of future success.

The TANF program targets DC's families living in deep poverty – those who live far below the poverty line – and provides up to 60 months of modest cash assistance, job training, subsidized childcare and transportation support. The good news is that progress has been made in improving the TANF program – for example, wait times for job training have decreased & number of families participating has doubled – and we can build on that progress.

Evidence shows that family economic stability is key to a child's success. TANF's monthly cash assistance, while modest, is often the difference between a child going to bed hungry or having heat in the cold winter months.

¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2015 Federal Poverty Guidelines.

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

³ Wes Rivers, DC Fiscal Policy Institute, *Going, Going, Gone: DC's Vanishing Affordable Housing* 1 (2015), <http://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Going-Going-Gone-Rent-Burden-Final-3-6-15format-v2-3-10-15.pdf>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Ilana Boivie, DC Fiscal Policy Institute, *Hearing on Unemployment Worker Profiles Underlines the Need for Improved Services for Job Seekers* I (2015), <http://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/6.19.2015-Unemployment-Profile-Act.pdf>.

Help TANF Work for DC Families

Despite the importance of the TANF safety net for our most vulnerable families, DC is poised to push children deeper into distress by dropping over 6,000 families who have reached the 60-month time limit from the program – including more than 13,000 children – on October 1, 2016.

- Even with the best TANF services, some families face deep barriers like domestic violence or a disability, that get in the way of finding or holding a job. DC’s current rigid time limits do not give families the time they need to succeed. It’s also out of step with the rest of the country.
- The reality is, if families are kicked out of TANF without being put on a road to self-sufficiency, they will end up straining other costly programs – such as homeless services or child welfare programs.

Pass the DC Public Assistance Amendment Act of 2015

The District of Columbia Public Assistance Amendment Act of 2015 (B21-0515) builds on DC’s progress in fixing its TANF program – and aligns our policies with 44 other states – to ensure TANF works as it is intended.

The Department of Human Services is improving its job training, education and social supports for families. For families to take advantage of these reforms, we need the DC Council to pass legislation that makes sure families can continue on the path to self-sufficiency.

The DC Public Assistance Amendment Act of 2015 would reform DC’s TANF program to:

- Continue to provide benefits after 60 months for parents and their children who face domestic violence, a severe disability, homelessness or other barriers that have gotten in the way of employment.
- Continue to provide benefits after 60 months for families who are following all program requirements but are still unable to find a job.
- Support our poorest children in the TANF program, even if their parents cannot otherwise qualify.
- Regularly check-in with families on TANF to ensure that families facing hardship are protected and provided additional supports when needed.
- Educate families on TANF about the 60 month time limit; regularly inform families about how many months they have left and what exemptions and extensions are available to them.

The DC Public Assistance Amendment Act of 2015 was introduced by Councilmembers Nadeau, Silverman, May, Todd, Orange, and Bonds on December 1, 2015. The bill has been referred to the Committee on Health and Human Services.

This bill is supported by Bread for the City (Christine Wong - cwong@breadfortheconomy.org), Children’s Law Center (Kimberly Waller – kwaller@childrenslawcenter.org), D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence (Erin Larkin – elarkin@dccadv.org), D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute (Kate Coventry - coventry@dcfpi.org), Fair Budget Coalition (Monica Kamen – monica@fairbudget.org), Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia (Curt Campbell – ccampbell@legalaiddc.org), So Others Might Eat (Samantha Davis – sadavis@some.org) and Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless (Becky O’Brien – becky@legalclinic.org).

This is our chance to strengthen TANF so DC families facing the greatest odds have the support they need to get on a path to greater independence.