
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The District of Columbia has long been known as a city of substantial economic divisions. The findings in this report show that those divisions have worsened in recent years, and that the many signs of the city's economic revitalization hide the fact that many residents are not moving ahead.

This analysis also shows that efforts to bridge DC's economic divide by helping lower-income residents will require strategies to increase employment among DC residents but also steps to raise earnings for residents who are working. Employment rates for African-American residents and residents without a college degree are at historically low levels, contributing to declining incomes for these groups. At the same time, wage growth has been very modest for DC's lowest-paid residents, creating ever-widening distance between their earnings and the rising cost of living in DC. And most DC families that are low-income have one or more working adults.

Improving education and training in the District — primary and secondary education, higher education, basic literacy, and workforce training — should be a central part of such efforts. At the same time, efforts are needed to help residents who remain in low-wage jobs, since the DC economy will continue to rely heavily on workers without a college degree. This includes policies that increase earnings — such as an adequate minimum wage — and other policies that help low-wage workers meet their basic needs, such as child care assistance, health care, and housing.

The District has taken notable steps in this direction, including adoption of a substantial Earned Income Tax Credit and health care coverage for working poor families and individuals. At the same time, the findings of this report indicate that much work needs to be done. This is the challenge facing DC's leaders.