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Restoring Cuts to Interim Disability Assistance Should be a 2014 Budget Priority

By Kate Coventry

With a recovering economy, Mayor Gray was able to propose a number of [investments in programs](#) across DC government in his fiscal year (FY) 2014 budget. Unfortunately, not all DC residents are recovering along with the economy and the mayor's budget left out some of the programs that help these residents, behind. One of those programs is Interim Disability Assistance (IDA) which provides short-term assistance to residents with disabilities that prevent them from working. During the Great Recession, funding for IDA was cut and the number of individuals the program can serve dropped by 80 percent. The District should use its growing resources to reinvest in IDA, ensuring that all residents benefit from the city's recovery.

The IDA program provides \$270 a month — or about \$9 a day — to residents who have disabilities that prevent them from working. These residents are in limbo — unable to work and waiting to learn if they are approved for federally Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, which can take a year or two, if not longer. IDA provides critical financial assistance during this period, helping residents meet basic needs, such as rent (often shared with others), prescriptions, and necessities like toothpaste. Without IDA, many people with disabilities are forced to rely on more costly crisis services, such as emergency rooms and shelters, thus costing the District more.

In addition, if the federal SSI application is approved, the federal government reimburses the District for IDA assistance paid during the application period, thus helping to fund the program. DC's recovery rate is in line with similar state programs across the U.S.

Here is the story of one the DC residents helped by IDA:

MR. R is a native Washingtonian who was forced to rely on emergency services when an injury left him without the use of his right arm, leaving him unable to continue working as a street vendor. After losing his job, he ended up living in a homeless shelter but once he received IDA benefits he was able to move into a permanent supportive housing (PSH) apartment. After a year and a half, he was approved for SSI benefits. The District was reimbursed for the IDA payments made to Mr. R., and he now has a stable source of income that will allow him to remain in his apartment.

Yet, despite these benefits, funding for IDA has been slashed in recent years, from \$5.6 million in FY 2008 to just \$1.5 million in FY 2013. As a result, the number of individuals served by the program dropped 80 percent, from 2,900 to 550, even though the need has remained the same. The mayor's budget has only a modest increase of \$125,000 for IDA in FY 2014, enough to provide benefits for only 38 additional individuals.

IDA is a good investment in the well-being of residents with disabilities and for the city as a whole. The District can ensure an additional 1,200 residents get this critical assistance in FY 2014 by adding an additional \$3.8 million to the modest budget increase included in the mayor's budget.