



## Guest Blog: The District Should Offer Same Protections for Domestic Violence Survivors as Other States Do

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When a mother escapes domestic violence, she must do many things simultaneously: find new housing, make up for the loss of financial assistance from her abuser, seek treatment for injuries, attend day-long court hearings regarding protection orders, assist with criminal prosecution of the abuser. All of this must be done while also handling the regular responsibilities associated with being a parent. A mother receiving assistance from the TANF program is faced with a conflict--how to meet all of these responsibilities while also preparing for and looking for employment?

Take the circumstances of a few TANF recipients in a District domestic violence shelter. One resident must care for her disabled child because other child care options have been inadequate. Another resident had to deal with a child's medical emergency and missed an opportunity to join a job training program. These barriers are on top of living in a domestic violence shelter, working to achieve safety, and rebuild a new life with their children.

About 2,700 families that receive TANF in DC have experienced severe domestic violence that prevented them from fulfilling their mandated work requirements, according to [one study](#). Although survivors can apply for exemptions from work requirements, the time limit clock keeps ticking. This is not the case in 43 states, which exempt or extend the TANF time limits for victims in recognition of the economic, social, and familial hardships they face and because of the logic of tying work exemptions to time limit exemptions. When survivors of domestic violence hit the time limit in states without an exemption, they more often return to abusive partners and rely on those partners for financial security.

The District's TANF reform, particularly the new in depth assessment, has done a better job than ever before at identifying survivors of domestic violence. Individual responsibility plans can be tailored to include the vast appointments and needs of survivors of domestic violence. Why then sharply cut income assistance at 60 months--and ultimately kick those recipients out of the TANF program--when they still need to address a significant barrier to work?

The District must join the vast majority of the country in exempting survivors of domestic violence from the time limit. By fully funding this exemption, thousands of victims of domestic violence will not have to face untenable choices that could risk the safety and security of both themselves and their children.