

April 23, 2014

## WHAT'S IN THE MAYOR'S PROPOSED FY 2015 BUDGET FOR INTERIM DISABILITY ASSISTANCE?

The District's Interim Disability Assistance (IDA) program provides temporary cash benefits to adults with disabilities who have applied for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and are awaiting an eligibility determination. IDA is similar to interim assistance programs offered in 38 states, including Maryland and Virginia. SSI approval can take anywhere from several months to several years. The benefits paid to IDA recipients are reimbursed by the federal government if an applicant is ultimately determined to be eligible for SSI.

The fiscal year 2015 proposed budget for (FY 2015) Interim Disability Assistance is \$3.54 million that would support a maximum of 1,350 monthly clients. This represents a \$443,000 increase over the approved budget of \$3.1 million, after adjusting for inflation (unless stated otherwise, all figures are adjusted for inflation to equal FY 2015 dollars). This 14 percent increase will allow the District to serve an additional 350 clients monthly in FY 2015.

### Analysis of the FY 2015 IDA Budget

The FY 2015 Interim Disability Assistance Budget includes \$3.54 million to support a maximum of 1,350 residents. The proposed budget represents a \$443,000 increase over the FY 2014 approved budget. (See **Figure 1**.) The FY 2015 budget reflects \$2.54 million in local dollars and \$1 million in federal recovery dollars — the federal funds received by the city when an IDA recipient is deemed eligible for SSI.

The monthly caseload for IDA has decreased greatly over the past few years, from an average of 2,759 per month in 2009 to 1,000 in FY 2014. The additional investment of \$443,000 in FY 2015 is estimated to allow an additional 350 individuals to receive IDA monthly.

IDA serves as a vital lifeline for DC residents who cannot work and have no other income or other means to support themselves. IDA allows recipients to pay for basic needs such as transportation, medicine, toiletries, and food. In addition, the modest \$270 in steady monthly income allows access to community-based services and housing that requires a minimum income to participate. The reduced funding and caseloads for IDA since 2009 suggests that many residents with disabilities have no regular source of income.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### MAYOR'S FY 2015 BUDGET PROPOSAL

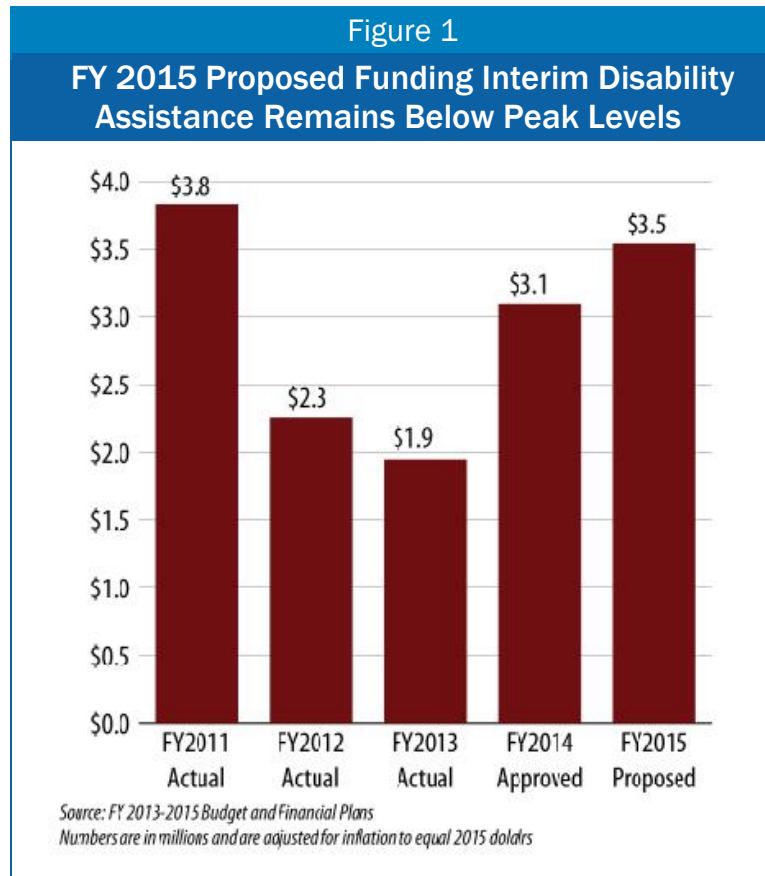
- Increases funding for Interim Disability Assistance (IDA) to \$3.54 million in FY 2015, a \$443,000 increase over the approved FY 2014 budget.
- Allows for an increase in the maximum monthly IDA caseload to 1,350 cases in FY 2015 from 1,000 cases in FY 2014.
- Provides no funds to help residents with the complicated process of applying for federal SSI benefits, even though this has been shown to get federal benefits faster and to more residents.

Interim Disability Assistance is supported by a combination of locally appropriated funds, federal dollars recovered from the Social Security Administration (SSA), and carryover of any unspent recovery funds from prior years. When a recipient is approved for SSI, the federal government reimburses the District, usually for 100 percent of that individual’s IDA payments. According to the Economic Security Administration in the Department of Human Services, there is an 18- to 24-month lag from the time an IDA benefit is paid to the time when the money might be recovered from SSA.

IDA began as a relatively small program in fiscal year 2002, serving an average of 420 individuals per month. Over the following five years, local funding grew and recovery funds added to the budget, allowing IDA to serve more residents with disabilities. By 2009, Interim Disability Assistance served nearly 2,800 residents with disabilities.

Funding for IDA has been cut sharply since the start of the recession, leading to significant cuts in the number of residents assisted. In FY 2009, the DC Council cut funding to address a mid-year budget gap, and enrollment contracted. Additional cuts in subsequent years eventually led to a 1,500 cap on enrollment in the program in mid-fiscal year 2010. In January 2011, the program stopped enrolling new participants, due to an unexpected reduction in funds mid-year. Currently, the Department of Human Services (DHS) has a 1,000

person cap on enrollment in the program and has cleared the waiting list. The FY 2015 proposed budget will allow DHS to increase the per person cap to 1,350 persons per month.



### SSI Application Assistance

The FY 2015 budget for Interim Disability Assistance includes no funding to assist individuals with the complicated process of applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Because recovery dollars depend on federal approval of SSI applications, an investment in application and legal assistance for IDA recipients could increase the funds recovered by the District.

IDA can also serve more residents with less local money if residents are able to begin receiving SSI benefits more quickly. As it stands, the process can take one to two years. With additional technical assistance, DC can decrease the time that residents have to depend on IDA while awaiting SSI approval.

## Performance Measures

The budget for each government agency includes a number of performance measures tied to specific agency objectives. In addition, each agency develops a performance plan each year, and it completes a “performance accountability report” at the end of the year.

The performance measures are intended to provide an indication of how well the agencies are using funds to meet their goals. Unfortunately, the quality of performance measures in the District’s uneven. In many cases, performance measures are unclear or cover aspects of an agency’s functions that do not seem tied to the agency’s core functions.<sup>1</sup>

The FY 2015 budget includes no performance measures related to the Interim Disability Assistance program. The Department of Human Services tracks a number of IDA metrics internally, including the caseload, length of the waitlist, and average wait to be served. These are not published as part of its performance measures, however, despite the importance of understanding the impact of recent IDA budget cuts on the program’s ability to meet demand. Without tracking basic data on the program’s performance, it is difficult to assess the program’s effectiveness or the impact of various policy changes on the program’s ability to serve DC residents with disabilities.

The performance measures for IDA should also include a count of clients at each stage of the SSI application process, the SSI approval rate at each stage of appeal, and the average duration of each stage of the process. Additionally, DHS should track the percent of applicants for IDA that are approved for the program, the percent ultimately approved for SSI, and the top reasons for final denial for SSI.

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<sup>1</sup>The issues related to DC’s performance measurement are discussed further in a 2009 DCFPI report, [\*Ten Ways to Improve the Transparency of the DC Budget\*](#).