



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Strengthening Rapid Re-Housing Will Help Homeless Families Succeed

By Kate Coventry

One of the keys to addressing DC's homeless crisis is to strengthen Rapid Re-Housing, DC's program that provides short-term rental assistance and supportive services to homeless families. The District currently is developing new rules to govern this program, which is also known as the Family Re-Housing and Stabilization Program (FRSP), and three particular issues stand out. The proposed rules would require families to pay too much of their limited incomes for housing, require homeless families to find housing without any initial help, and cap housing assistance at 12 months in most cases, even though some families may need more help.

These proposed rules run counter to best practices, and modifying them would make FRSP a more effective tool to help homeless families get out of shelter and into their own homes.

FRSP currently requires families to spend at least 40 percent of their income on rent, with their contribution increasing over their time in the program. This is higher than the 30 percent threshold used for most federal housing programs, and it is likely to force families to cut back what they spend on food, transportation, healthcare and other necessities.¹ We recommend the District cap what families pay toward rent at 40 percent of income, with a portion of that set aside in an escrow account to pay for necessities and emergency needs.

FRSP also currently requires families to attempt to find housing on their own, before receiving housing search assistance. Yet other communities have had success by helping families negotiate with landlords to lower rents or to address issues such as a poor credit and rental history.² DC families searching for their own housing have reported that landlords do not understand how the program works and thus have been reluctant to participate in it.³ This leaves families in shelter for longer than is necessary. FRSP will be more successful if parents receive immediate housing search and negotiation assistance.

¹ Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, "The State of the Nation's Housing," 2011, http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/son2011_housing_challenges.pdf

² Core Components of Rapid Re-Housing. Endorsed by USICH, NAEH, HUD, and VA. <http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/RRH.pdf>

³ Weiner, Aaron. Where Are D.C.'s Homeless Families Living Now That D.C. Doesn't Have to House Them? *Washington City Paper*. May 21, 2014.

<http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/housingcomplex/2014/05/21/spring-fever/>

Finally, the District proposes limiting FRSP assistance to 12 months except for families experiencing “extraordinary circumstances.” Yet the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) recommends against using a hard time limit and notes that programs must be “flexible enough to permit extensions if best efforts fail or another crisis occurs.”⁴ NAEH also recommends that Rapid Re-Housing programs take into account each family’s individual circumstances as well as community conditions such as high unemployment. DCFPI recommends that the District adopt this approach—individualizing the length of the subsidy to each client’s circumstances.

Together, these changes will lead to a stronger program, allowing more families to succeed.

To see DCFPI’s full comments, click [here](#).

⁴ Rapid Re-Housing: Creating Programs that Work. National Alliance to End Homelessness. July 2009. http://b.3cdn.net/naeh/adc8b82e3d49a50252_7dm6bk8te.pdf