



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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How Will DC Shelter Families This Winter?

by Kate Coventry

Tomorrow marks the official beginning of hypothermia season, and an increase in family homelessness is expected, but the District has yet to release details of how it will meet the legal obligation to shelter families during cold weather months. Last year, insufficient planning and a large increase in homelessness led the District to place some families in recreation centers, yet preliminary court decisions stopped this practice because of its risks to children. And just this week, the DC Council gave [preliminary approval to legislation](#) clarifying that homeless families must be sheltered in private rooms.

This means that other options are needed. There are three key issues that need to be addressed soon to avoid the crisis of last year: securing needed overflow shelter capacity, addressing a shortfall in homeless services funding, and improving services that move families from shelter.

Shelter Capacity: The Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) predicted in its Winter Plan that shelter capacity would not be sufficient to get through the winter. Yet the District has not developed and shared how it will meet overflow needs, such as using motels or suitable DC properties. The Department of Human Services reported at a Council hearing this week that it was in contract negotiations for additional capacity but offered no details such as the number or location of this capacity.

Addressing the Funding Shortfall: The ICH also recognized that the homeless services budget was inadequate to pay for needed overflow shelter, and the Chief Financial Officer recently confirmed an \$11 million shortfall in the family shelter budget.¹ This is partly because this year, the District does not have access to some sources



Photo by: AgnosticPreachersKid, available [here](#).

¹ Fiscal Impact Statement – Dignity for Homeless Families Amendment Act of 2014. October 15, 2014.

of federal funds that were used last year. Identifying resources soon to fill that gap will make it possible provide appropriate services efficiently and effectively.

Read DCFPI's testimony on the Winter Plan [here](#).