



## DC Gets Mixed Grades for its Response to Family Homelessness: More Progress Is Needed

By Kate Coventry

The District has made improvements to services for homeless families in response to the crisis that occurred last winter, but progress has been uneven and large gaps remain, according to a new report by a coalition of community organizations, including the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. The [\*Helping Families Home Roadmap: A Report Card on DC's Progress in Helping Homeless Families\*](#) assesses what DC has done since last winter to help homeless families – and what more the new mayor and DC Council need to do to build a high-quality homeless services system.



The report card notes progress in some important areas: a new homelessness prevention program is being launched, there are new investments in affordable housing for families, and the District is securing additional shelter capacity for this winter. The District has released a plan for a new system of smaller shelters to replace the DC General Family Shelter, although it is not clear if this plan will yield enough shelter capacity to meet the need.

Yet, there has been a tremendous lack of progress in key areas. Many children are not receiving the case management support they need while in shelter. The plan to replace the rundown DC General Family Shelter lacks funding and a timeline. The District is planning to fund homeless services using \$10 million from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) budget, and it is unclear whether this will lead to cuts in other vital programs. Finally, DC has made little progress towards the goal of providing access to shelter year-round.

The report outlines the steps the new mayor and Council should take to provide families access to decent shelter and help families quickly move from shelter to a safe and stable home. These include:

- A detailed shelter replacement plan should be released this winter so funding can be included in the fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget, scheduled to be released in March 2015.
- Strengthening Rapid Re-housing can help families get into housing more quickly and reduce the number of families in shelter.
- Funding for licensed social workers to help kids at DC General is available, but the District needs to hire them.

- Creating more affordable housing in the FY 2016 budget, using rent subsidies and the Housing Production Trust Fund, will help more families avoid homelessness and create more options for families who need help after Rapid Re-Housing ends.

Over the next four months, DC has the capability to make major improvements to its family homelessness system. We hope this report card contributes to efforts to help all families find a safe and stable home.

To read the complete *Report Card*, [click here](#).

Progress on Goals for Improving DC's Family Homelessness System	
Goal	Grade
Goal 1: All Families Currently in Shelter Should Be Moved Into Safe Housing Before November 1 <sup>st</sup> .	C
Goal 2: Specific Improvements in Case Management and Services at Virginia Williams Family Resource Center and DC General.	D
Goal 3: Develop new and strengthen existing prevention and diversion efforts.	B
Goal 4: Explore ways to improve assistance for youth-headed households.	C
Goal 5: Shelter all families safely until alternative housing can be identified. <sup>1</sup>	C
Goal 6: Ensure DHS has sufficient resources to deploy any of its tools to end a family's homelessness in a timely manner.	C
Goal 7: Strengthen Rapid Re-housing.	C
Goal 8: Better data reporting on performance measures, budgeting and planning, and spending.	D
Goal 9: Create affordable housing that meets families' needs.	C
Goal 10: Plan for new family homeless shelters in DC.	C

- **A:** The goal has been substantially fulfilled.
- **B:** The District is making progress toward the goal.
- **C:** The District is taking steps, but it is too soon to determine if they will result in significant progress.
- **D:** There has been no significant progress made toward the goal.
- **F:** There has been no progress made at all toward the goal.

<sup>1</sup> This goal is intended to address the problems of the District using recreation center placements for homeless families last winter and for placing families for just one night at a time and only during hypothermic weather.