

TESTIMONY OF ED LAZERE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
At the Performance Oversight Hearing on the Department of Human Services
District of Columbia Committee on Human Services
March 1, 2012

Chairman Graham and other members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ed Lazere, and I am the executive director of the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI engages in research and public education on the fiscal and economic health of the District of Columbia, with a particular emphasis on policies that affect low- and moderate-income residents.

I would like to focus my testimony today on an opportunity the District has to expand access to employment-related education and training by taking better advantage of the employment and training component of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as the food stamp program). The SNAP Employment and Training program (SNAP E&T) provides federal matching funds to support workforce development efforts, but the District is not taking full advantage of this opportunity. This was the subject of a December 2011 policy brief from the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, which is attached.

DC operates a small and somewhat isolated SNAP E&T program, drawing down less than \$1 million in federal fund. With unemployment in the District still on the rise, efforts to expand access to education and training are extremely important. While the Department of Human Services appears open to efforts to expand use of this resource, the agency has limited staff to implement and develop these plans, especially with much of the ESA staff focused, appropriately, on TANF re-design efforts.

SNAP E&T provides federal funding to cover 50 percent of the costs of a wide array of services intended to improve employment for SNAP participants, including job search assistance, GED preparation, community college tuition and materials, job skills training, counseling, and supportive services such as child care and transportation. The District and the states can receive SNAP E&T funds to support services operated by a variety of government agencies — such as the Department of Employment Services and the Department of Human Services — and also to help nonprofits expand their education and training efforts.

Under federal rules, SNAP E&T can be used to serve SNAP recipients other than those also receiving TANF cash assistance. This means that the program can serve low-income single and married adults without children, non-custodial parents, and parents caring for children if they are not on TANF. This is likely to include a large share of DC's 140,000 SNAP recipients.

There are a number of ways in which the District may be able to take better advantage of SNAP E&T to fund education and training services. For example:

- The District appropriated \$4.6 million for adult job training in fiscal year 2012. If this new program were made part of the SNAP E&T program, the city potentially could double funding for the program to \$9.2 million by receiving \$4.6 million in federal funds (50 percent of total costs) to enhance the local funds. The District would be able to receive federal SNAP E&T funds for training participants who also receive SNAP.
- The District operates an \$11 million subsidized jobs program – the Transitional Employment Program (TEP) — which serves low-income residents who are not receiving TANF benefits. Mayor Gray made a pledge during the mayoral campaign to revamp this program. Since it is likely that many TEP recipients are receiving SNAP benefits, the District could operate the revamped TEP program in compliance with SNAP Employment and Training requirements and expand it to serve more SNAP recipients using federal funds.
- The District can identify other current education and training programs – such as literacy programs operated by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education — that meet the SNAP E&T requirement of providing a direct link to local job opportunities and a clear path to employment. Particularly if the District plans to expand local funding for any of these services, it could target SNAP participants, and then match local funding with federal SNAP E&T funds, resulting in an even larger expansion.
- The District could establish relationships with local non-profits that provide education and training services that meet the SNAP E&T guidelines. This would allow the District to pass through SNAP E&T funds to non-profits to match funds they raise for allowable training or education services for SNAP participants, enabling them to serve more people or increase the quality of services provided. For example, Wal-Mart recently announced a \$3 million job training initiative, with awards going to area non-profits. If this effort were coordinated through the SNAP program, the Wal-Mart funds could leverage millions in new federal funds.

The District's Department of Human Services operates a SNAP Employment and Training Program, but it is small. The current program provides job search assistance, with transportation and child care support, to roughly 4,600 adults per year. It provides referrals to training programs, but does not fund any job training or education services, and DC does not use SNAP E&T to support the work of non-profit education and training providers. Funding for DC's SNAP E&T program, including both local and federal funds, was just \$1.5 million in 2011, and the federal share was under \$1 million.

Taking greater advantage of the SNAP Employment and Training program would require the District to take several actions, but the benefits of accessing federal funds make such actions worth taking. Perhaps most important, the city needs to devote one or two staff full-time to developing the plans and inter-agency agreements needed to expand the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.