



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog  
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## A Budget that Helps DC Residents in Crisis

By Kate Coventry

The District's Dime is focusing on the themes that we hope will be reflected in the fiscal year (FY) 2014 budget. Our focus today is on helping DC residents in crisis.

Many programs that serve DC's most vulnerable residents were cut during the Great Recession. This includes an 80 percent cut in the number of residents with disabilities who get help from the District while they apply for federal benefits. It also includes reductions in benefits for long-term welfare recipients without any of the protections most states put in place for families facing severe barriers to work.

As the city's revenues improve, the District can use its growing resources to reinvest in these programs, particularly Interim Disability Assistance (IDA) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The District also should use its resources smartly to help more DC residents through the complicated process of applying for federal disability benefits. The more help is provided up front, the more likely residents are to get through the complex application process. Federal SSI benefits provide more stable incomes while also reducing DC's budget demands.

**Help More Residents with Disabilities:** The IDA program provides \$270 a month to residents with disabilities that prevent them from working. These residents are in limbo — unable to work and waiting to qualify for federally Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, which can take a year or two, if not longer. Local funding for IDA was cut from \$5.6 million in FY 2008 to \$1.5 million this year. Only 550 residents are currently receiving assistance each month, compared to 2,900 in recent years.

**Help Families with Serious Barriers to Work:** Currently, the District doesn't require families facing serious issues, such as domestic violence or the need to care of an ill child, to be looking for employment, but each family's 60-month time limit clock continues to run, even though most states stop the clock in these situations. The Council's adopted budget for 2013 time limit exemptions for these families, but it was put on a contingent list was not funded due to inadequate revenues. Now that new revenue has been identified, these exemptions should be included in the FY 2014 budget.

**Help More Residents Apply for Federal Disability Benefits:** SSI provides a steady, monthly income for people who have disabilities that prevent them from working. There is substantial research showing that early assistance in the SSI application process — which the District currently does not offer — greatly increases the success in getting approved for benefits. Other states have increased the number of successful SSI applicants by training existing staff or contracting with a for-profit company or non-profit organization, at relatively minor expense. The District should adopt one of these strategies to enable residents with severe disabilities to exit crisis and secure a stable income.