



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog  
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## Guest Blog: DC's Prosperity Must be Shared in by ALL Its Residents

*Today's guest blog is written by M. Bruce Lustig, Senior Rabbi at the Washington Hebrew Congregation, & James E. Terrell, Pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Washington and President of the Council of Churches of Greater Washington*

Whether it be a time of prosperity or economic crisis, the community has a moral obligation to care for the least among us. The obligation is always there and we must respond. As leaders of faith communities and members of Good Faith Communities Coalition we remind those throughout the city of our common responsibility to share the gifts of God with all God's Children. The District is prospering, adding thousands of new residents each month and announcing large surpluses in revenue. But many residents are struggling and the prosperity that has helped so many in DC has also left so many behind.

DC lost half of its low-cost rental units over the last ten years. With rents skyrocketing and incomes staying flat, many families who must spend more than half of their income each month on housing are living just one step away from homelessness. For these low-income families it means little left each month to cover basic necessities like food, clothing, transportation and savings. It also means that they are more vulnerable to a sudden job loss or illness forcing them onto the streets.

Mayor Gray has pledged to invest the District's "prosperity dividend" to create and preserve 10,000 units of affordable housing by 2020. To jumpstart this effort he has stated that he will commit \$100 million from his upcoming budget to help meet the need. We urge him to focus this current investment on those residents in greatest need—very low income individuals and families (those earning less than 30 percent of area median income, or \$32,200 for a family of four) and the homeless. We applaud this \$100 million commitment, but even this substantial investment can only be a beginning. We urge Mayor Gray to make this investment the first step in a long term commitment to address the full range of affordable housing challenges the city faces.

For too many families homelessness is already an unfortunate reality. With the dramatic increase DC has seen in homeless families over past several years, Mayor Gray's budget must also include additional assistance for homeless residents. We are deeply concerned as a community by the 600 children at the family shelter at DC General and the lack of a right to year round shelter for priority one families (families with no safe place to go), persons with disabilities and seniors. For the most vulnerable among us, shelter must always be available, not just in hypothermia season. And shelters must not be a permanent address, but rather a first step to affordable, sustainable housing.

The recent report of the Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force, *Bridges to Opportunity*, set ambitious goals for DC — 8,000 units of affordable housing preserved and 10,000 net new units of affordable housing by 2020. Achieving this goal will take a long term commitment of resources and will from the District government and the community as a whole to see it through. We must have this resolve not only in times of prosperity, but also when the economy is lean. It is our moral obligation to respond.