



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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DC Council: Vote Yes to Ensure TANF Family Success

By Kate Coventry

Today the DC Council will consider a bill to delay steep cuts in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance that would otherwise go into effect April 1st for 6,500 families. The delay in cuts until October 1st was included in the 2013 budget on a “contingent” list, but could not be funded until the recent increase in DC’s [revenue forecast](#). Today’s action, if approved, will give parents more time to access the services they need to successfully transition to self sufficiency.

Even with this short-term delay, however, it is likely that many families will see a benefit cut in October without a job to replace the lost assistance. Steps will need to be taken to make sure these families don’t fall into crisis -- when TANF benefits fall to just \$257 for a family of three who has received assistance for 60 months or longer.

DC’s Department of Human Services is in the midst of implementing promising reforms that, if given time, will help more families prepare for work. By delaying cuts until October, for example, DHS will be able to complete one-on-one assessments for nearly all families facing a cut, providing an in-depth evaluation of each parent’s strengths and barriers to employment. Based on these results, parents are referred to targeted support services or an employment service provider. The results of this approach have been very promising, with parents in the pilot program increasing work participation [ten-fold](#).

Unfortunately, the six-month delay in benefit cuts is not enough to protect particularly vulnerable families who need more time to deal with serious issues that interfere with their ability to work, such as domestic violence or the care for an ill child. Currently, the District doesn’t require these families to be looking for employment, but each family’s 60-month time limit clock continues to run. Most states stop the clock to allow families time to deal with these issues. The Council’s adopted budget for 2013 also proposed creating time limit exemptions for these families, but this was also put on the contingent list and will not be funded by today’s Council action.

DCFPI encourages the Council to support this bill to help parents on TANF get the resources they need to be successful. We also urge Mayor Gray and the Council to work together to identify \$7 million in the fiscal year 2014 budget to maintain benefits for families with barriers that prevent them from looking for work. By working together, they can keep families on a path of progress and independence.