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## Guest blog: Give Parents Time Needed to Address Health Problems

By Judith Sandalow, Executive Director, Children's Law Center

Ms. C. is, by any measure, a success story. A single mother of 5 children, three of whom have profound disabilities, Ms. C. has knit together a loving family that looks out for one another. She has gotten her children into good schools, found them a safe place to live, and recently graduated from a barbering course. She is looking forward to a new career which will allow her to independently provide for her whole family.

Yet Ms. C. also shows us that success against long odds often hangs by a thread. During tough times, she has received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which kept her from facing impossible choices between things like food, children's clothing and putting gas in the car that gets them to their many doctor's appointments. Today, she is concerned that she will not find a barbering job before her TANF benefits are cut sharply in October because she has received TANF for more than 60 months. As DC's law currently stands, there is absolutely no way to postpone the date when she—and other parents in challenging circumstances—will lose assistance.

A closer look makes it clear that Ms. C.'s ability to get this far is a result of her amazing determination, but also help from several lawyers from Children's Law Center and a District of Columbia safety net that has allowed her to keep her family from the brink.

All three of her children with special needs require more intense medical attention than most children. One of them is suffering from an autoimmune disease that has caused him to go deaf, develop diabetes, hypertension, and cataracts. He requires constant professional care that his insurance company had threatened to cut. Ms. C. is routinely traveling throughout the Washington area for school meetings, to visit the family physician, or to see specialists. These trips routinely take at least 15-20 hours a week of her time.

In addition, Ms. C. has been through three apartments in the last five years through no fault of her own. The first apartment had such deplorable conditions as a result of landlord neglect that the District moved her to a new one. Her landlord's bank foreclosed on the second. With assistance from Children's Law Center, she navigated the foreclosure process until she could locate a safe and healthy apartment for her family—although it is extremely far from her children's schools and health centers.

Ms. C. is not only the face of a tremendous mother and role model; she is also the face of a TANF recipient facing many personal challenges, like so many other TANF families.

The instability that the upcoming benefit cut threatens for their family and others can be prevented. Many states allow for exemptions to the TANF time limit when a parent is taking care of a disabled child. States recognize that devoted parents, like Ms. C., will have a harder time obtaining work readiness skills and finding employment when their children require increased care.

TANF is a vital lifeline to a family like this one. By cutting it, DC would throw them into a chaos from which they might never recover. By giving them time and resources while they look for employment, we can ensure that they will be productive and self-sustaining well into the future.