



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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It's Time to Address DC's Crisis of Family Homelessness

By DCFPI Staff

Kudos to the *Washington Post* for its robust coverage of the District's homeless crisis. Metro reporter Brigid Schulte has put a sharp focus on the explosion in the number [homeless families](#) during this bitterly cold winter, the placement of families in [motels across the District and Prince George's County](#), and [now in rec centers](#). This morning, she and Metro colleague Aaron Davis put the issue in context over the [course of Mayor Gray's four-year term](#). The editorial page has also [weighed in](#), imploring the Gray administration to work with policymakers and advocates to come up with a realistic plan to move families out of shelter and into stable housing quickly.

Here are some steps that could help in the short-term:

- **Speed up housing placements.** The District should strive to move at least 100 housing families out of shelter per month, an increase from the rates of 40-75 in recent months. This requires aggressive outreach to private landlords, including offering one-time incentives for placements. The District also needs to expand its capacity to inspect housing units and bring them on-line.
- **Build staff capacity, particularly around the rapid re-housing program.** The District aims to serve 80 percent of homeless families with rapid re-housing, a program that moves families out of shelter quickly and into housing with temporary subsidies and social supports, but there are no dedicated staff to run it.
- **Make sure funding is available immediately to help move families out of shelter.** Funding is likely inadequate for the three primary homeless services programs: Emergency Rental Assistance (ERAP), which provides first month's rent and security deposit; Rapid Re-housing, a program offering time-limited subsidies and supportive services; and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), which is a housing-first model of providing both permanent housing and wrap-around services to those who have been chronically homeless.
- **Create a Family Crisis Response Committee.** Representatives from the Department of Human Services, the Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (DHS's primary homelessness contractor), family providers, and advocates will need to come together to monitor progress and troubleshoot delays in implementation. This committee should report back to the community at least monthly.

In addition, there are medium-term steps that could be taken to prepare for next year's hypothermia season. These include improving prevention and diversion programs, enhancing services for youth-headed households, and ensuring that families who become homeless can access help year-round, not only in the winter. And in the long-term, the District must continue to invest in affordable housing throughout the city to help families avoid becoming homeless.

A document outlining a proposal that includes these steps can be found [here](#).

The Gray administration did not create the homeless crisis, but it alone has the tools to resolve it. The District needs to take immediate action to solve this crisis that is costly to the District and devastating to parents and children who are without a place to call home.