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**TESTIMONY OF KATE COVENTRY, POLICY ANALYST
At the Public Hearing on
Department of Human Services Budget
District of Columbia Committee on Human Services
April 30, 2014**

Chairman Graham and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kate Coventry, and I am a policy analyst with the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI engages in research and public education on the fiscal and economic health of the District of Columbia, with a particular emphasis on how policies impact low-and-moderate income families.

I am here today to testify on family and individual homelessness and what the District can do to improve its homelessness response.

Helping Families Home: A Roadmap for the District

Today, twenty nonprofit organizations, including DCFPI, are releasing *Helping Families Home: A Roadmap for the District* (attached), a community report laying out the actions the District must take from now until next spring to put DC on a path to a system that serves families appropriately with the goal of quickly connecting families with the right services, including emergency shelter if needed, when they need it, regardless of the time of year.

This, unfortunately, hasn't been the case in DC for the past several years. Families have been able to enter shelter only when it is cold. Shelter conditions have been deplorable. And many families have been in shelter for too long. The unexpectedly harsh winter DC faced this year brought the crisis of the family homelessness system into sharp focus.

No one wants to repeat the crisis from last winter, when some families were placed in recreation centers — which the courts found could lead to irreparable harm to children — and only on nights when it was below 32 degrees. Yet without sufficient planning and funding, the likelihood is high that the crisis will be repeated next year.

In order to avoid last year's crisis and lay the foundation for a high-quality family homelessness system, the report lays out key goals, and the steps needed to achieve those goals, some of which are already in progress. The roadmap focuses on five key areas for the District to tackle:

- **Safe and adequate emergency shelter for families when they need it.** Families with no safe housing option should be able to access shelter year-round. They should not be forced out when the weather gets above 32 degrees. And they should be sheltered in safe and decent

settings. As the District develops a new emergency shelter system, improvements at DC General -- in both the facility and services — are needed to ensure the well-being of vulnerable families with children.

- **A system that quickly connects families with the right services to limit their stay in shelter.** The District should build the capacity needed to assess families, match them with resources, and move families out of shelter within 30 days. This can improve the families’ well-being and reduce the risk that shelters will be filled beyond capacity.
- **A robust set of tools to meet the unique needs of each homeless family.** The District needs strong prevention and diversion programs to help families avoid needing emergency shelter. It needs to strengthen Rapid Re-housing — the main tool to move families out of shelter quickly. And it needs to take a closer look on how to better meet the needs of DC’s youth-headed households that represent a large share of homeless families.

- **Affordable housing for families.** Efforts to move families out of shelter need to be coupled with investments in affordable housing. The shortage of low-cost housing is a key contributor to homelessness, and families will have an easier time ending their homelessness if they can find housing that is affordable.

Table 1: Funding Necessary to Implement Helping Families Home Roadmap by Program	
Program	Funding Needed
DHS Permanent Supportive Housing	\$598,000: FY 2014 \$2,898,000: FY 2015
Rapid Re-housing (also known as Family Re-Housing and Stabilization Program (FRSP))	\$5,167,050: FY 2015
Trauma-informed care training for DC General staff.	\$5,000: FY 2014 \$5,000: FY 2015
10 Family Case Managers for DC General	\$500,000: FY 2015
New Prevention Program aimed at families most likely to enter shelter	\$300,000: FY 2014 \$2,000,000: FY 2015 (1-time funding possible)
New Mediation Center at Virginia Williams Family Resource Center	\$16,000: FY 2014 (1-time) \$555,000: FY 2015
Local Rent Supplement Program (tenant-based)	\$600,000: FY 2014 \$4,000,000: FY 2015
Shelter families until alternative housing can be identified	\$2,106,000: FY 2015
TOTAL	\$1,519,000: FY 2014 \$17,231,050: FY 2015

- **Improved data on performance, budgeting, and spending.** Today, policymakers and the public have limited information from DC on the

performance of the family homelessness system, on how funding is allocated and spent, and on the division of responsibilities between DHS and its main contractor, the Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness. This makes it difficult to assess the changes needed to create a well-functioning system.

Importantly, this roadmap identifies the funding needed in fiscal year (FY) 2014 and FY 2015 budget to achieve these goals. When all resources available in FY 2014 are considered, the FY 2015 budget for homeless families represents a decrease of \$11 million, or 20 percent from the FY 2014 adjusted budget, after adjusting for inflation.

By next spring, the community believes that the Interagency Council on Homelessness, which has just hired its first executive director, will have had time to make necessary internal reforms and begin creating a long term plan for the family homelessness system to pick up where this report leaves off.

Homelessness is a Crisis for the Individual Facing It

We cannot let the huge increase in the number of families seeking shelter overshadow the needs of individuals who are also facing the crisis of homelessness. Far too many individuals are homeless in the District and many of them have been homeless for years. As a member of *The Way Home* campaign, DCFPI is thrilled that the mayor has included \$4.7 million in the proposed budget to end veteran homelessness by 2015. But we cannot stop there.

The District must make progress on its goal of ending chronic homelessness by fully funding the FY 2015 goal of the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Production Plan. This will require an investment of \$2.5 million in the DHS PSH program, in addition to the \$2.9 million needed for families, and of \$2 million in project/sponsor-based Local Rent Supplement to support the construction of new PSH units.

Additionally the District needs to invest \$250,000 in our Coordinated Entry System for individuals. Coordinated Entry allows homeless individuals and providers to find each other in a systematic way. Service providers have recently launched a small pilot effort without any dedicated funding, but this funding is now needed so more individuals can be served. Coordinated Entry only works if there are housing resources for the individuals who have been assessed. An investment of \$1.5 million to continue the individual Rapid Re-housing pilot will provide these needed resources.

Finally, DCFPI recommends that funding be added to the FY 2015 budget to continue the work of the Creative Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV) Task Force. On any given night, nearly 20 percent of the District's homeless individuals stay in the CCNV building. In light of these numbers, efforts to help the District's homeless individuals must include a plan for CCNV. It would be helpful for funding for professional data analysis and modeling assistance to develop an options analysis for the redevelopment of CCNV within the context of the broader individual shelter system. This would comprehensively lay out the possible options for the CCNV site with particular concern for how these options would affect the shelter system as a whole. The number of shelter beds the District needs is tied to redevelopment at other shelter sites, particularly 801 East, as the proposed FY 2015 budget includes funds for exploring its redevelopment. It would be useful to have an analysis of CCNV that takes into account changes at other shelters. Additionally, funding for the facilitation of further community conversations to review options would also be helpful.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I'm happy to answer any questions.