



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog  
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## Family Homelessness Is on the Rise in DC: FY 2015 Investments Can Help

By Kate Coventry

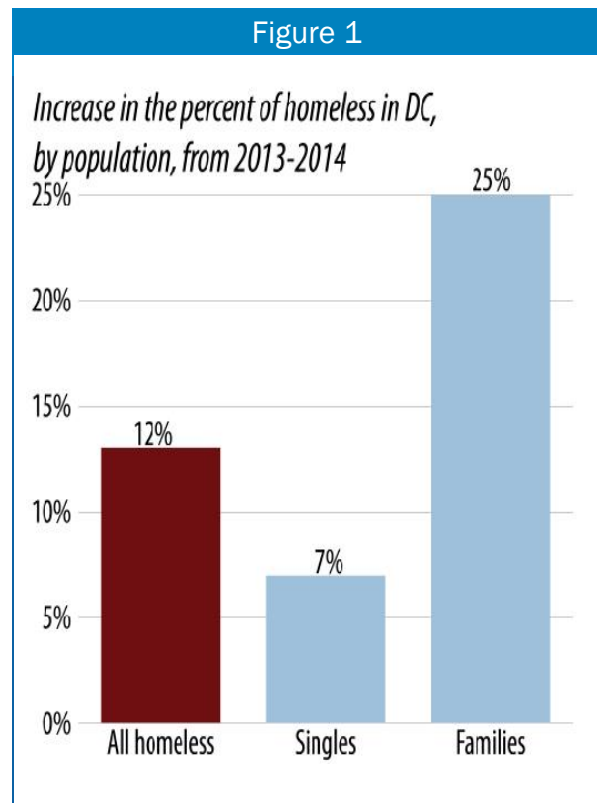
Yesterday, nearly 640 residents lent their names to the chorus of organizations and residents calling on the District to address its family homelessness crisis. A [petition](#) delivered to the DC Council asks the Council to make critical investments in the FY 2015 budget to ensure that the District has a high-quality family homelessness system and avoids a repeat of the tragic problems of the past year.

New [numbers](#) confirm what this year's harsh winter brought into focus: family homelessness is a growing problem in DC, jumping 25 percent in just the past year. (See **Figure 1**.)

No one knows exactly why this happened, but a clear factor is DC's uneven economic recovery that [left many residents behind](#). Wages remain below 2008 levels for residents without a college degree. The unemployment rate for residents with a high school diploma is 20 percent, compared with 12 percent before the recession started. These worsening job realities and DC's increasing lack of affordable housing undoubtedly are the main contributors to the rise in family homelessness.

A lack of investment in programs aimed at helping the homeless get back on their feet also is a factor. Services to help prevent homelessness and others that help move families out of shelter quickly are under-funded. And until the recent announcement of a plan to move 500 families out of shelter, the District government has not given the family homeless crisis the attention it needed.

That is why an increase in funding and focus in FY 2015 is so important. The Council has devoted \$500,000 for the Emergency Rental Assistance program which helps prevent homelessness by providing down payment assistance, first month's rent, and rent in arrears. The Council also approved \$2.3 for permanent supportive housing for families. Permanent supportive housing



provides intensive case management and housing assistance to the chronically homeless, or those with significant mental health or chronic health conditions.

But there is still a long way to go to tackle the increase in homeless families. More resources are needed, for example, to provide short-term assistance to move families out of shelter and for rental assistance to families who are unable to afford DC's high rents on their own. The Council needs to hear [your voice](#) that funding programs for homeless residents is important.