



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog
www.dcfpi.org

January 7, 2015

We Can Help More DC Residents Get Good Jobs

By Ed Lazere

Helping more DC residents build job skills – and making sure that jobs in DC offer the pay and benefits people need to succeed – should be top priorities for Mayor Bowser and the DC Council. This will require such steps as improving literacy and training programs, strongly enforcing the minimum wage and other employment laws, and strengthening policies to ensure that jobs in the city are good for workers.

At first glance, the District's seemingly strong economy should be helping everyone, but a deeper look reveals troubling trends that hold back some residents.

- **High unemployment among the less well educated:** Twenty percent of residents without a college degree are unemployed, up two-thirds from 2008.
- **Falling wages for many:** DC residents in the bottom fifth of the city's wage distribution saw their earnings fall to \$12 an hour in 2012 (the last year for which data are available) from \$13 in 2008. Meanwhile, pay rose for higher-wage workers.



The District has a number of strengths to build on, including a minimum wage that will reach \$11.50 an hour in 2016, and a requirement that employers provide paid sick leave to all workers. Recent legislation prohibits employers from asking about an applicant's criminal record until a job offer has been made. And the District operates a number of training programs.

But that's not enough. To more effectively combat high unemployment and lagging wages, the District should:

- **Raise the Minimum Wage for Waiters and Other Tipped Workers:** The minimum wage for workers whose jobs require them to rely on tips in addition to salary is just \$2.77 an hour, and was not raised when the basic minimum wage increased to \$11.50.
- **Connect Literacy Programs and Job Training:** A "career pathways" task force will issue recommendations this year to better connect literacy programs and job training that leads to employment. The mayor and Council should implement those recommendations.

- **Enforce New Wage and Job Benefits:** In addition to minimum wage and paid sick leave changes, the District recently adopted stronger penalties for employers who fail to pay their workers all they are due. These changes will need to be communicated to workers and businesses, and the District will need adequate staff to enforce them.
- **Adopt Family Leave Insurance:** The District should create a system that workers can pay into and draw from to replace wages if extended leave is needed to be with a new child or to care for an ailing relative. Some states have done this. Paid leave helps hard-working men and women balance the often competing demands of job and family without falling behind.
- **Make Better Use of Federal Job Training Money:** SNAP (food stamps) provides federal funds to cover half the cost of providing job training and work supports such as transportation or work uniforms for SNAP recipients. Yet the District does not take full advantage of this important tool. Last year, for example, the District claimed just \$2 million in SNAP Employment and Training funds, but it could have claimed much more.

To read the full copy of DCFPI's jobs transition brief, click [here](#).