



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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DC Can Do More to Help Parents Struggling to Find Employment

By Kate Coventry

With so many parents struggling to find jobs, Mayor Bowser and the DC Council need to take steps soon to help thousands of families who face losing employment services and cash benefits this fall. Many of these parents face employment challenges – including a lack of good-paying jobs for workers without a college degree – which means thousands of children could fall deeper into poverty with little hope that their parents will find good jobs.

The best move is for Mayor Bowser's new employment and human services leaders to develop a plan to assist these families – and to delay cutting families off for a year while a new plan is being developed.

Even if they are doing everything they can but still can't find work, more than 6,000 families – with 13,000 children – are slated to be cut off from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) this October, because they have received assistance for more than 60 months. They will lose cash assistance and important job preparation services, worsening the big challenges that already make it difficult to get jobs, like disabilities or low literacy.

Many others will struggle to find a job despite their best efforts simply because [job prospects remain weak](#) for DC residents with less than a bachelor's degree. One-third of DC adults with a high school degree are either unemployed, working part-time despite wanting a full-time job, or too discouraged to even look for work. Others are working but have seen [wages fall while housing costs rise](#).

DC should delay the TANF cut off to allow for the development of a plan to serve the District's most vulnerable families. The District should do what 44 states do: allow families who face big challenges to receive TANF after they reach the time limit, while they continue to make progress toward employment or other goals. It makes sense to prevent these families from falling further behind.

Additionally, the new plan to help these families should include services other states have found effective at helping parents get jobs. This includes specialized assessments to identify disabilities and helping individuals figure out how to cope with them at work. For example, some people have disabilities that make it difficult to read and understand written instructions. Vocational rehabilitation counselors can help negotiate with employers for accommodations such as being given instructions verbally.

Economic recovery in DC has been uneven, and many will be left behind without improved services. Helping families stay afloat until parents find work is important to ensuring that all District families can have a brighter future.

To read a copy of DCFPI's testimony on TANF, click [here](#).