



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Council Should Protect Vulnerable Families with Children in the FY 2017 Budget

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The proposed fiscal year (FY) 2017 budget extends benefits and employment assistance for one year to 6,200 families who otherwise faced the loss of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash benefits and services in October 2016. While this protects families from being cut off for one year, it does not make any progress to reform policies that already have left families with incredibly low benefits. It also does not fix a rigid time limit policy that puts vulnerable families in dire circumstances at risk of losing all assistance.

DCFPI will be testifying today to urge the Council to take steps now, in the FY 2017 budget, to address these issues.

Under the proposed budget, families who have received assistance for 60 months or more will receive just \$154 a month for a family of three in FY 2017. This reflects benefit cuts due to time limits that have been implemented since 2011. Given that most TANF families do not receive housing assistance, this is far too low for families to make ends meet.

And under the proposed budget, all families who have received assistance for more than 60 months will lose both cash assistance and employment services in October 2017, regardless of their circumstances, with no opportunity to receive assistance again.

Getting the TANF time limit right – modifying it to ensure that it provides stability to families and children who need it the most – is important to child well-being and to the success of other mayoral initiatives, such as ending homelessness. Nearly 300 families in DC's Rapid Re-Housing program, which helps families exit shelter, have received TANF for 52 months or more, putting them at risk of going over the cliff. Losing their entire income source would make it incredibly hard to successfully exit homelessness.

Legislation to reform DC's TANF time limit was introduced in the DC Council in 2015. While that bill, the Public Assistance Amendment Act of 2015, has not been adopted, it could form the basis for time limit reforms. The bill would create extensions to give families access to TANF's help when they face difficult situations – such as domestic violence – even if they have reached the time limit, with extension eligibility reviewed periodically. The legislation also would continue assistance to children when a family reaches a time limit without qualifying for an extension, to ensure that a time limit focuses on parents but does not hurt children.



DCFPI urges the Council to take steps this budget season to adopt time limit reforms and fund as many of these reforms as possible. This will ensure that some vulnerable families will be restored to full benefits this year and will put the District on a path to adopt a comprehensive TANF policy that protects all vulnerable children.