

## DC Needs a Budget that Invests in District Residents

By DCFPI Staff

DC's vibrant and growing economy has made it a great place to live and work for many, but the benefits of our new prosperity are not being shared widely. Our healthy economy has had troubling downsides, including an increase in homelessness, displacement of people of color from the city, and widening racial inequities in access to affordable housing, quality health care, and educational opportunities.

The DC budget—our community's decisions about how to spend our resources—is the central tool for addressing these challenges. Budget choices can help ensure that all DC residents thrive, through investments in our schools, affordable housing, health care, homeless services, jobs and training, and more. Smart use of the city's resources to support residents also lays the foundation for a strong future for the city as a whole.

DC's growing economy and strong finances give us the opportunity to make bold investments in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget. The District has a proud history of supporting services that make a difference for all of us, like housing, health care, schools, libraries and rec centers. Yet in many cases, those investments are not enough to meet the scope of our challenges. Affordable housing programs still make up just three percent of the DC budget, for example, and school funding in recent years has not kept up with inflation and enrollment.

The following recommendations for the FY 2019 budget reflect effective ways to use the city's resources and prosperity to address DC's challenges and create a promising future for all residents.

### Health Care

The District should take important steps in the FY 2019 budget to strengthen access to quality health care, improve public health, and reduce racial and economic inequities in health access and outcomes. An investment of up to \$17 million in the **DC Healthcare Alliance program** would eliminate barriers that prevent thousands of residents—most of whom are immigrants—from accessing this program. This funding would support streamlining an unnecessarily burdensome re-certification process. An investment of \$7.4 million would maintain **Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services** provider rates and build on community support services for DC residents in the Health Homes program, so that DC residents with behavioral health needs can continue to access effective treatment options. A \$2-per pack increase in the District's tobacco tax would **reduce tobacco use**, especially among youth, and increase resources for services that help people quit. An investment of \$2 million for **Home Visiting programs** for families with young children would replace lost federal funds and help ensure children enter school ready to learn, improve early cognitive and physical development, and increase use of needed health services and immunizations. [Read more.](#)

## Affordable Housing

The District's recent efforts to create and preserve affordable homes, while substantial, have made only a modest dent in the city's affordable housing challenges. Workers in low-paying jobs and residents relying on fixed incomes bear the brunt of DC's high housing costs. The housing crunch hits residents of color the hardest, putting communities with long-term roots in DC at risk of displacement. Yet since 2015, DC has funded just a small fraction of the overall need for units affordable to the city's extremely low-income residents. Faster progress is needed. The Mayor and Council should make a substantial down payment toward DC's complete affordable housing needs in FY 2019, by ramping up the city's investments in the **Housing Production Trust Fund**, and especially in the **Local Rent Supplement Program**, the one housing tool guaranteed to create housing affordable to those with the lowest incomes. Greater investments in affordable housing will be key to making inroads on the city's racial equity, economic mobility, and homelessness challenges. [Read more.](#)

## Homelessness

The District has made significant efforts to tackle homelessness in the past few years but more needs to be done to reach DC's goals of making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. The Mayor and Council should put a substantial investment towards helping residents experiencing **chronic homelessness**. These are residents who have been homeless for years and suffer from life-threatening health conditions and/or severe mental illness that are made worse by the lack of a home. The District should also **improve conditions in shelters** for individuals experiencing homelessness and expand **the Homeless Prevention Program** that currently serves only families to serve individuals as well. A \$5.5 million investment is needed for shelter and transitional housing for **survivors of domestic violence**. Domestic violence is one of the leading causes of homelessness and providers must frequently turn survivors away because of lack of capacity. The District should also make investments in **long term affordable housing** for families who need it to avoid a return to homelessness. The District should build on its investments to **end youth homelessness** by fully funding Year 2 of Solid Foundations, the Comprehensive Plan to End Youth Homelessness. And finally, the District should invest \$600,000 in **public restrooms** to ensure that all residents have a place to go. [Read more.](#)

## Early Childhood and Pre-K to 12 Education

The District is not investing enough in education to give all students the support to reach their full potential. Students of color and low-income students, who represent the vast majority of DC students, experience fewer opportunities and face barriers to academic achievement starting at birth. The FY 2019 budget should provide targeted resources to address racial injustice and economic inequality.

This starts with investments in our youngest children. DC should adopt pending legislation to give **child care** providers enough resources to offer high-quality early education to low-income children, and to support salaries for staff on par with similarly credentialed Pre-K teachers. The FY 2019 budget should include an \$11 million "down-payment" toward that goal, for the toddlers of today. DC must also implement the **special education reforms** adopted in 2014 that expand early intervention services for more toddlers with delays, in addition to providing faster evaluations and better high-school transition planning for older special education students.

The District needs to invest more in supports for school-age children, both inside and outside the classroom. This includes \$25 million to give low-income students the same enriching, **out-of-school-time opportunities** as their higher-income peers. The District should also provide enough funding for **DCPS**

**and public charter schools** to meet growing enrollment and the rising cost of living, and to ensure “at-risk” funding is dedicated to targeted services for low-income and academically struggling students. Beyond that, schools should get additional resources to stop school push-out and support evidence-based solutions for school discipline, like **Restorative Justice**, and every school that wants to become a **community school** should have enough resources to develop holistic ways to meet the needs of the families and neighborhoods they serve. [Read more.](#)