

New TANF Policy Ensures Greater Financial Stability for Kids and Families

By Kate Coventry

DC families are no longer threatened by an arbitrary time limit that would have cut off benefits and services regardless of the family's needs. In April, the District implemented its new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) time limit policies, which were passed one year ago. Approximately 6,000 families who were receiving very low benefits are now receiving the full benefit amount. Given the [significant body of research](#) on the importance of economic stability for the health and wellbeing of children, these policies are great news for children most in need of support in the District.

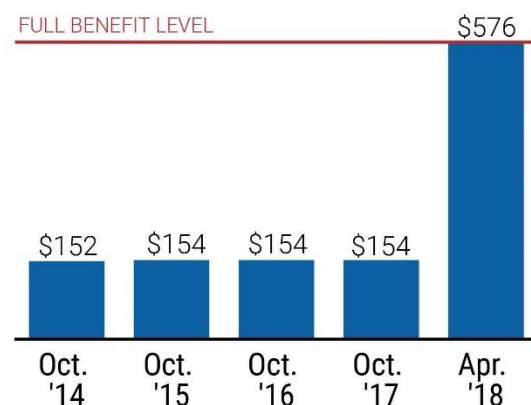
TANF provides cash assistance, subsidized childcare, and employment resources to help families with children facing economic hardship. In 2011, the District passed one of the harshest time limits in the country, which would have cut families from assistance even if they were working hard to find a job or dealing with serious challenges, like domestic violence or health problems. Since October 2014, families who had received TANF for more than sixty months were receiving drastically reduced benefits—just over \$150 per month for a family of three.

Twenty years of federal TANF reform have shown that strict time limits often fall on families facing serious challenges and do not lead to sustainable employment. And, children often fall into extreme poverty as a result. A [survey](#) of long-term TANF recipients in the District found that roughly 40 percent had a physical health issue and over 30 percent had depression or anxiety severe enough to prevent them from participating in meaningful work activities.

The District's new policy to maintain full benefits for children is not only humane, but smart public policy. Most TANF recipients in DC do not receive housing assistance and use TANF to pay rent. Without this resource, many would be pushed closer to homelessness. Moreover, stable family income is critical to creating a healthy environment for children to grow. With financial stability at home, students perform better in school, which leads to higher graduation rates and more hours of employment as an adult. Preserving benefits for children will create a brighter future for DC's children and for the District as a whole.

Eliminating Time Limits Has More Than Doubled Resources for Families

Monthly benefits for a family of three after 60 months on TANF.



Note: Figures are not adjusted for inflation.
Source: Fiscal Years 2015-19 Budget & Financial Plans and Budget Support Acts.

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