

On Anniversary of Federal Welfare Changes, DC Stands Out as a Rare Success for Families

Across the nation, federal welfare changes adopted 22 years ago tomorrow have resulted in hardship and an increase in extreme child poverty in many states. The District, on the other hand, stands out as a unique success story, through actions by DC's leaders to ensure that the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program supports low-income families with children. With these changes, the District is a role model for how TANF can help families with children in other jurisdictions.

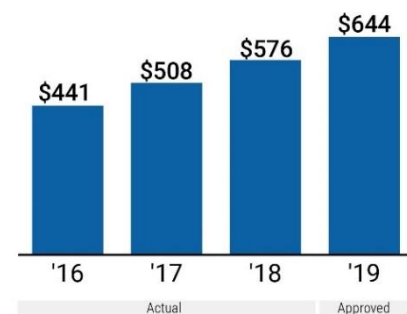
TANF provides cash assistance, subsidized childcare, and employment resources to help families with children facing economic hardship. With cash assistance, families can pay rent and utility bills and buy things like over-the-counter medication for a sick child, school supplies, or new shoes. This assistance is a crucial resource for many children, as family economic stability has lasting impacts on a child's ability to succeed in school and later in life.

Many states have used the flexibility provided under federal welfare changes to adopt policies that have harmed families with children, including very low benefits and short time limits that cut families off regardless of their needs. The District, by contrast, has taken steps to make TANF a support for families.

- Last year, DC became the first jurisdiction in the country to undo a harmful time limit that would have permanently cut 6,000 families—including 10,000 children—from assistance, driving families into extreme poverty as a result. The District's new policy went into effect this past April.
- Countering the trend of other states, DC has raised TANF cash assistance benefits to help families meet the rising costs of housing and other needs. (Most TANF recipients in DC get no housing aid.) DC's TANF benefits will be \$644 a month for a family of three in 2019, up from \$441 a month in 2016. While this still leaves families in poverty, and is far less than the cost of housing, the increase will help more families achieve stability.
- The District has also taken steps to embrace a two-generation approach, with programs that give parents the resources they need to better support their kids. One of these programs is the Mental health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) partnership, which brings accessible mental health resources to mothers who suffer from depression. The program shows strong results:

TANF Benefits Will Rise for All Families in FY 2019 Budget

Monthly benefits for a family of three, not adjusted for inflation.



Source: Fiscal Year 2018-19 Budget & Financial Plans; Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Support Act of 2015; 29 DCMR § 7200; DC Code § 4-205.52; Rule Number 29-5814.

76 percent of participants experienced a decrease in depressive symptoms and 67 percent had a decrease in parenting stress. Children of participants attended 6 more days of school per year than children of non-participants. And the percentage of mothers working at least 15 hours a week increased from 15 percent at the start of the program to 39 percent six months after graduation from MOMS.

“Unlike so many states that have used federal welfare changes to limit help to families in need, DC has shaped its TANF program to support families and give parents resources they need to care for their children,” said Kate Coventry, Senior Policy Analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. “Because of this, more DC families have the resources they need to help their children be healthier, do better in school, and see greater long-term success.”

###