

**Testimony of Kate Coventry, Senior Policy Analyst  
At The Way Home Campaign's People's Roundtable to End Homelessness  
June 22, 2020**

My name is Kate Coventry and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes budget choices to address DC's economic and racial inequities and to build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations.

I would like to focus my testimony on two areas of the budget that fall far short of the need—Permanent Supportive Housing and Street Outreach.

**Proposed Budget Makes Investments in Chronic Homelessness, But Much More is Needed**

Housing is healthcare. Every day individuals experiencing chronic homelessness die from preventable and manageable diseases. Now, the connection between housing and healthcare is even more evident when one of the keys to staying healthy is staying at home. Individuals who are homeless are particularly likely to acquire COVID-19 because of their age, vulnerability, exposure to many people while living in dormitory-style shelter, and/or inability to keep clean while living outside. And because of their health conditions, [they are twice as likely to need to be hospitalized and two to three times likely to die from COVID.](#)

DCFPI is a member of The Way Home, the campaign to end chronic homelessness in the District, which sets budget targets each year to meet the goal of ending chronic homelessness. The proposed budget adds nearly \$5 million in new funding to provide Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) to 96 individuals and 54 families. PSH provides long-term housing and case management to residents facing chronic homelessness who would otherwise have difficulty remaining housed. This is by far the smallest number of new vouchers since the DC Interagency Council on Homelessness passed *Homeward DC: The Strategic Plan to End Homelessness* in March 2015 (see Table 1).

If the District does not make a larger investment in housing, individuals will likely die from lack of housing. At least 81 people in DC died in 2020 without the dignity of home. The number of deaths will likely be higher in 2021 because of COVID. As of June 21<sup>st</sup>, 20 homeless residents have died from COVID-19 alone. Homeless residents are dying at a rate approximately 6 times that of the general DC population.<sup>1</sup>

We join The Way Home campaign in calling for at least 1,500 PSH units for individuals and 302 units for families. **The DC Council should invest an additional \$66 million to end chronic homelessness for 1,650 households** to meet these benchmarks.

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<sup>1</sup> DC Government, Human Services Agency COVID-19 Case Data, <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/page/human-services-agency-covid-19-case-data>

TABLE 1.

**Number of New Tenant-Based Vouchers Dedicated to Homeless Residents, By Year**

	FY 2016 Actual	FY 2017 Actual	FY 2018 Actual	FY 2019 Actual	FY 2020 Approved	FY 2021 Proposed
Individuals	268	549	401	459	615	96
Families with Children	255	207	147	464	383	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>998</b>	<b>150</b>

Note: Includes Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Targeted Affordable Housing (TAH) vouchers that are filled by referrals from the Department of Human Services.

**Street Outreach**

The proposed budget does not replace \$2.1 million in one-time funding that lawmakers allocated to street outreach services in FY 2020. Street outreach provides critical services to residents who do not stay in shelters. Outreach is particularly critical during this pandemic as workers monitor the health of homeless residents and help meet their medical and other needs. Residents are more dependent on these services now because many daytime service centers are closed because of the pandemic. DHS reports they hope to partner with the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) to replace some of these services with local or federal funding. Services from DBH are generally limited to residents with a confirmed mental health problem. This may leave some homeless residents without outreach services. **Given the critical nature of street outreach, DCFPI recommends the Council add \$2.1 million to ensure that residents do not fall through the cracks if they cannot get more details on how much resources DBH has and how they can be used.**

**The District Should Adopt a Bold Revenue Strategy**

To build a just economy, the Council should raise additional sources of revenue in order to make strong investments in affordable housing and to stem the tide of displacement of Black and brown low-income communities. While we applaud the Mayor's resourceful leadership in finding ways to stave off major cuts, her FY 2021 budget does not go far enough. We urge the DC Council to consider the revenue strategies presented in the Fair Budget Coalition's Revenue Recommendations letter (Appendix A), including but not limited to:

- Making wealthy residents, particularly those earning over \$250,000 in taxable income, pay their fair share of income taxes;
- Repealing the Qualified High Tech Company Tax Incentive, which the CFO has found to be ineffective and poorly targeted;
- Closing other tax loopholes that allow profitable corporations to not pay their fair share; and,
- Using more of our reserves to address immediate needs.

Our recent poll with DC Action for Children found that 83 percent of DC voters support raising taxes on wealthy residents and corporations to prevent cuts to essential services, with nearly four out of five residents opposing budget cuts that would hurt Black and brown residents.

The recent surge in police violence against Black communities reminds us that state-sanctioned oppressions have long been manifestations of larger degradations—structured economic injustice, entrenched inequality, and racism. To build a fair budget, DC Council should also examine the Metropolitan Police Department’s \$540 million budget and redirect a portion of funding into programs that actually support, protect, and stabilize communities.

We have a choice about how we want to craft our recovery as a city. Will we come together and create innovative revenue strategies to build a stronger, more inclusive future, or will we allow inequities to widen, forcing out longtime residents and workers who are the backbone of our economy?