

TANF Cuts Will Cause Lasting Harm to Children

DC's budget for FY26 included deep cuts to TANF cash assistance that will push thousands of children deeper into poverty. **The TANF cuts stand out from other federal and local cuts to the safety net adopted last year because they solely target families with children, including young children.**

DC TANF maximum benefits today are just \$803 per month for a family of three. The TANF cuts will harm at least 15,300 children starting in FY27, with time limits and sanctions that will cut monthly benefits to \$562 in FY27 and as little as \$151 in FY29 for a family of three.

Cuts to TANF will have multiple harmful and long-term effects on children, including:

- ▶ **Increasing hunger:** Many families use TANF to supplement inadequate SNAP benefits. Research shows that cash income supports food security.¹
- ▶ **Increasing homelessness:** Nationally, only ¼ of families with low incomes receive housing assistance, and it's likely the figure is similar in DC. This means that TANF is a vital source to pay rent and that cuts to TANF will mean more families facing eviction and homelessness.²
- ▶ **Increasing school absenteeism:** A study of chronic absenteeism in DC identifies "economic disadvantage" as a key contributing factor.³
- ▶ **Harming children's educational success:** Children in low-income families are less likely to finish high school, and they earn less as adults than children in higher-income families.⁴
- ▶ **Harming early childhood development:** Poverty limits the brain development of children, with long-lasting effects.⁵
- ▶ **Increasing parents' financial stress and the risk of child neglect:** Poverty increases the chance a child will enter the child welfare system.⁶

Mayor Bowser and the DC Council should reverse these cuts to avoid lasting harm to DC children.

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Endnotes

¹ Lucie Schmidt, Lara Shore-Sheppard, Tara Watson, “The Effect of Safety Net Programs on Food Insecurity,” National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2013. Retrieved on December 16, 2025 from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w19558>

² Ali Zane, Cindy Reyes, and LaDonna Pavetti, “TANF can be a critical tool to address family housing instability and homelessness,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 19, 2022. Retrieved on December 17, 2025 from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/tanf-can-be-a-critical-tool-to-address-family-housing-instability-and>

³ Chelsea Coffin and Hannah Mason, “Patterns and predictors of chronic absenteeism in D.C.’s middle and high schools,” D.C. Policy Center, October 14, 2025. Retrieved on December 17, 2025 from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/patterns-and-predictors-chronic-absenteeism-dc-middle-and-high-schools/>

⁴ Kate Coventry, “When Every Dollar Counts: Child Poverty Has Lasting Negative Effects, But Even Small Income Boosts Help,” DC Fiscal Policy Institute, February 11, 2016. Retrieved on December 17, 2025 from <https://www.dcfpi.org/all/when-every-dollar-counts-child-poverty-has-lasting-negative-effects-but-even-small-income-boosts-can-help-2/>

⁵ Sonya Troller-Renfree, et al., “The impact of a poverty reduction intervention on infant brain activity,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, February 1, 2022. Retrieved on December 17, 2025 from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35074878/>

⁶ Aditi Shrivastava and Urvi Patel, “Research Reinforces: Providing Cash Assistance to Families in Poverty Reduces Risk of Family Involvement in Child Welfare,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 1, 2023. Retrieved on December 17 from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/research-reinforces-providing-cash-to-families-in-poverty-reduces-risk-of>