

January 14, 2026

Dear DC Councilmembers and Staff,

The undersigned organizations and individuals are writing to urge DC's leaders to reverse the cuts to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) that will result in 14,000 low-income families with children, primarily Black and Brown families east of the Anacostia River, losing cash assistance in Fiscal Year (FY) 2027. Mayor Bowser proposed significant cuts to TANF in the FY 2026 Budget Support Act that will reduce cash benefits for thousands of families in the District. The Council rejected these changes for FY 2026, but they are set to go into effect in FY 2027. **These budget cuts reflect policies that in FY2029 could leave a family of three with just \$151 per month in cash income, down from a maximum benefit of \$803 they receive today. Not only have such policies never demonstrably worked, but Mayor Bowser also soundly rejected them a decade ago precisely due to the evidence proving they are ineffective and harm children.**

As the District's only cash-based assistance program, **TANF is a vital lifeline to families.**<sup>1</sup> Cash is critical to helping families meet their needs – paying rent and utilities, buying diapers and clothes, connecting their kids with educational tools, utilizing transportation, and so much more. Having available cash provides power, flexibility, and greater stability, especially during uncertain economic times.

**TANF cuts will upend the progress the District has built and will harm vulnerable parents and children.** Specifically, the cuts include:

- Ending cost-of-living adjustments for TANF benefits;
- Reinstating time limits for families receiving TANF for 60 months or more; and
- Increasing sanctions for not meeting work readiness requirements.

### **Breaking Down the Numbers: Planned Cuts to TANF for a Family of 3**

Failing to reverse these TANF cuts will harm children, not just the parents and caregivers.<sup>2</sup> The harm of *all* these changes will be significant (*see the table below*). The depth of benefit reductions grow in subsequent FYs, where families are facing a potential reduction of their benefits by 81% by FY 2029:

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<sup>1</sup> Ed Lazere and Lizuly Merav, *TANF Is a Lifeline for DC Families with Children Recent Cuts will deepen child poverty and should be reversed*, United Planning Organization (UPO), (November 2025), available at: <https://www.upo.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/UPO-TANF-Policy-Paper-Nov-2025.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> TANF full-family benefits are intended for the entire household. Accordingly, cuts aimed at full-family benefits reduce the total cash available to the entire household. Conversely, adult benefit cuts only impact the parent's portion of a family's benefit amount.

## TANF Time Limits and Sanctions Will Greatly Reduce Incomes for Thousands of Families with Children

The table below illustrates what the maximum cash benefit would be available to families impacted by the new policies of sanctions, time limitations, and no cost-of-living adjustments (COLA). Note that the cuts are more significant as the fiscal years go on because there is no COLA (which is currently 2.9%) so the cuts come from the 2026 cash benefit level. So even if a family is not impacted by time limitations or sanctions, their benefit remains stagnant every year.

	FY 2027		FY 2028		FY 2029	
Policy Change	New Maximum Benefit	Cut from 2026 Level	New Maximum Benefit	Cut from 2026 Level	New Maximum Benefit	Cut from 2026 Level
Time Limit	\$562	-\$241 (30% decrease)	\$402	-\$401 (49% decrease)	\$201	-\$602 (74% decrease)
Sanction	\$602	-\$201 (25% decrease)	\$602	-\$201 (25% decrease)	\$602	-\$201 (25% decrease)
Time Limit and Sanction	\$422	-\$381 (47% decrease)	\$301	-\$502 (62% decrease)	\$151	-\$652 (81% decrease)
COLA Only	\$803	-\$23 (2.9% decrease)	\$803	-\$46 (5.7% decrease)	\$803	-\$70 (8% decrease)

Source: Special data request to the DC Council Committee on Human Services, November 2025.

## In 2016, The Bowser Administration Rejected Punitive Policies In DC's TANF Program Due To Evidence Showing They Are Harmful And Ineffective

In 2016, Mayor Bowser established a working group<sup>3</sup> that recommended eliminating time limits and minimizing sanctions because of their negative impact on children.<sup>4</sup> The TANF cuts for FY

<sup>3</sup> TANF families, DHS, DC Council members, advocates, and community organizations.

<sup>4</sup> The evidence gathered in 2016 has not changed: work requirements increase hardship, leave children worse off, and fail to improve long-term employment outcomes. Time limits also have similar negative effects for families – increasing homelessness and child maltreatment. See Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Expanding Work Requirements Would Make It Harder for People to Meet Basic Needs*, (March 15, 2023), available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/expanding-work-requirements-would-make-it-harder-for-people-to-meet>; First Focus on Children, *The Harmful Consequences of Work Requirements and Other Obstacles to Aid for Children*, (February 20, 2025), available at: <https://firstfocus.org/resource/the-harmful-consequences-of-work-requirements-and-other-obstacles-to-aid-for-children/>. Shinn M, Gibbons-Benton J, Brown SR. Poverty, Homelessness, and Family Break-Up. Child Welfare. 2015;94(1):105-122. PMID: 29326481; PMCID: PMC5760188.; Chaplin Hill, TANF & Child Welfare Innovations, (July 2024), available at: [https://www.chapinhill.org/wp-content/uploads/Chapin-Hall\\_TANF-Child-Welfare-Innovations\\_July/](https://www.chapinhill.org/wp-content/uploads/Chapin-Hall_TANF-Child-Welfare-Innovations_July/)

2027 directly contradict this working group's 2016 recommendations. The TANF cuts also run contrary to economic justice work underway locally, including the Council's restoration of the Child Tax Credit and boost to the Earned Income Tax Credit. The benefit of these tax credits will be undermined if TANF cuts reduce basic family incomes to such low levels. Moreover, TANF cuts run counter to the supportive approach of DC's Career MAP pilot program as well as the progress DHS is making on work outcomes.

### **Harming Children Living in Poverty Will Undermine Mayor's Growth Agenda and Is Not the Way to Balance the District's Budget**

The Executive argues that TANF faces rising program costs, yet a portion of that cost reflects the intentional policy to "catch up" the COLA after decades of nearly stagnant benefit levels, and importantly, **the number of families receiving TANF has in fact fallen in recent years.** Additionally, **local TANF cash expenditures have grown at about the same pace as the overall DC budget.** Moreover, TANF cuts are coming at a time when many families could experience cuts in other essential benefits. At the same time, living costs continue to rise. As the federal benefit landscape changes and the cost-of-living continues to increase, we must ensure we have a strong safety net on the local level.

**The DC Council must reject these changes and ensure no cuts to TANF** – this means continuing to fund TANF with COLA, ensure no time limitations, and keep sanctions at current rates. The DC Council must also ensure that any changes to TANF only affect the adult's portion of the household's benefit, as cuts to the full-family benefit, as proposed by the Executive, significantly decrease benefits and unduly punish children.

We welcome the opportunity to work with DHS and the DC Council. However, the current working group will not be meeting until at least February or March 2026, which is not enough time to inform the Mayor's FY2027 budget proposal. We urge DHS and the DC Council to work with advocates prior to this date on this urgent issue. We must move forward, not backward and preserve TANF as a lifeline for District families who already face (and will face additional) significant hardship.

To learn more please visit, [www.childrenslawcenter.org/TANF](http://www.childrenslawcenter.org/TANF)

Please reach out to Leah Castelaz, [LCastelaz@childrenslawcenter.org](mailto:LCastelaz@childrenslawcenter.org) and Maria Manansala, [mmanansala@dcfpi.org](mailto:mmanansala@dcfpi.org) for additional follow-up.

In solidarity with DC families,

1. Advocates for Justice and Education
2. Allister Chang, SBOE Ward 2
3. American Academy of Pediatrics, DC Chapter
4. Ayuda
5. Ben Williams, SBOE Ward 1
6. Black Swan Academy
7. Blacks in Law Enforcement
8. Brandon Best, SBOE Ward 6
9. Bread for the City
10. Briya PCS
11. Building Bridges Across the River
12. CARE Anacostia
13. CARE Brookland
14. CARECEN
15. Carlene Reid, Former SBOE, Ward 8
16. Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
17. Center on Budget & Policy Priorities
18. CentroNia
19. Child Welfare Monitor
20. Children's Law Center
21. Coalition for DC Public Schools
22. Commissioner Jamila White (8605)
23. Commissioner Salim Adofo (8C07)
24. Community of Hope
25. Community Services Agency of the Metropolitan Washington Council, AFL-CIO
26. DC Action
27. DC Behavioral Health Association
28. DC Central Kitchen
29. DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
30. DC Fiscal Policy Institute
31. DC For Democracy
32. DC Greens
33. DC Hunger Solutions
34. DC Jobs with Justice
35. DC Justice Lab
36. DC KinCare Alliance
37. DC Primary Care Association

38. DC SAFE
39. DCAEYC (District of Columbia Association for the Education of Young Children)
40. Decoding Dyslexia DC
41. Diverse City Fund
42. Douglass Community Land Trust
43. Early Childhood Innovation Network (ECIN)
44. Eboni-Rose Thompson, SBOE Ward 7
45. EducationDC.net
46. Emily Gasoi, former SBOE member, Ward 1
47. Empower DC
48. EmpowerEd
49. End Child Poverty CA powered by GRACE
50. Everyone Home DC
51. Fair Budget Coalition
52. Fihankra Akoma Ntoaso, FAN-DC
53. First Shift Justice Project
54. Helping Ourselves to Transform
55. Higher Achievement
56. Homeless Children Playtime Project
57. Hope and a Home
58. If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice
59. Jacque Patterson, SBOE President
60. Jamila White, ANC 8C05
61. Jews United for Justice
62. Joe Weedon, former SBOE Member, Ward 6
63. Kellibrew Survivors' Network
64. LaJoy Law Johnson, SBOE Ward 8
65. Legal Aid DC
66. LIFT-DC
67. Mark Jones, former SBOE member, Ward 5
68. Markus Batchelor, Former SBOE, Ward 8
69. Marshall Heights Civic Association
70. Mary's Center
71. Mi Casa
72. Miriam's Kitchen
73. Mothers Outreach Network
74. Multicultural Spanish Speaking Providers Association
75. Nalle PTO
76. National Organization for Women, DC Chapter
77. ONE DC

78. Pathways to Housing
79. Paul Laurence Dunbar Association
80. PAVE
81. Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church
82. People for Fairness Coalition
83. RCM of Washington
84. Robert Henderson, SBOE Ward 5
85. Ruth Wattenberg, former SBOE Member, Ward 3
86. Serve Your City/Ward 6 Mutual Aid
87. SHAPPE - Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators
88. SMYAL
89. SOME, Inc.
90. Spaces in Action
91. T. Michelle Colson, SBOE Ward 4
92. Teaching for Change
93. The Festival Center
94. The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
95. Tzedek DC
96. United Planning Organization
97. Volunteer Legal Advocates
98. Ward 1 Education Council
99. Ward 2 Education Council
100. Ward 4 Education Alliance
101. Ward 5 Education Equity Committee
102. Ward 6 Public Schools Parent Organization
103. Ward 7 Education Council
104. Ward 8 Education Council
105. Washington Interfaith Network (WIN)
106. Washington Teachers Union, AFT Local #6