

TANF Cuts Will Cause Lasting Harm to Children

DC's budget for FY26, and proposed budget for FY27, 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.**

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

The Council must restore TANF funding to reverse these harmful policies beginning in FY27.

For questions or more info, contact Leah Castelaz at LCastelaz@childrenslawcenter.org and Maria Manansala at mmanansala@dcpfpi.org.

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>