

Children's Law Center believes every child should grow up with a strong foundation of family, health and education and live in a world free from poverty, trauma, racism and other forms of oppression. Our more than 100 staff – together with DC children and families, community partners and pro bono attorneys – use the law to solve children's urgent problems today and improve the systems that will affect their lives tomorrow. Since our founding in 1996, we have reached more than 50,000 children and families directly and multiplied our impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit hundreds of thousands more.

We hope that a new Mayor will bring:

- the fresh energy needed to meet the challenges of this moment;
- a bold vision for how to ensure that *all* DC children can thrive; and
- a commitment to collaboration, transparency and accountability.

To support that effort, Children's Law Center has the following recommendations for the new administration based on our expertise and experience working with DC children and families, with a particular focus on actions the Mayor can take within their first 100 days. These recommendations reflect our top priorities, and we hope they will serve as a starting point for broader and deeper engagement with the new administration in each of these policy areas. We welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these recommendations and build a strong partnership.

To discuss any of our recommendations, please contact Children's Law Center Policy Director Tami Weerasingha-Cote at tweearasingha-cote@childrenslawcenter.org.

Anything marked with a kite is an opportunity for the new Mayor to make a significant impact within their first 100 days. 

Every child deserves a strong foundation of FAMILY.

A stable family environment is a critical building block for a child's current well-being and future success. For many DC families, the impacts of poverty and racism disrupt their ability to maintain security. To prevent this, the District government should invest in programs and benefits that make upward economic mobility a reality while effectively helping families meet their children's basic needs. Additionally, when a child cannot safely remain at home, the District must ensure they are surrounded by the same supports and stability they should have received in their communities.

To connect more DC children with a strong foundation of family, the new Mayor should:

Invest in Effective and Cost-Efficient Programs to Help Families Meet Basic Needs

- Streamline case management across DHS programs to remove unnecessary and expensive duplication of services.
- Fund TANF at a level that will remove increased sanctions, stop time limits and increase the COLA to keep up with inflation (at least \$21.8 million in FY28, \$11.1 million in FY29 and \$11.4 million in FY30 to stop time limits). 🚀
- Collect comprehensive data on the circumstances and needs of DC's lowest income families to better inform program design and funding. This should include:
 - CFSA should report data on its use of diversion to understand the tools the agency is using to keep families together – which is often centered around filling poverty gaps. 🚀
 - Identify all relevant agencies that support or could support beneficiaries receiving public benefits and ensure data sharing agreements across relevant agencies are up to date to ensure identifying key characteristics of beneficiaries are easily accessible to develop a deeper understanding of the population.
 - Ensure clear requirement of collaboration by agencies who are serving people receiving public benefits (e.g. Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, housing vouchers, etc.) to address how they can work together to better serve DC children and families as well as individuals.

Prioritize Increasing Affordable Housing Options for DC's Lowest Income Families

- Focus District policies on increasing housing affordability where it is needed most, for families with incomes at or below 30% Area Median Income (AMI). For every

100 families at or below 30% AMI, there are only 37 housing units available in DC that they could afford, compared to 96 units for every 100 families at or below 80% AMI.

- Fund rental subsidies that are tailored to the economic realities of DC's lowest income families and designed to connect families to long-term housing stability (not simply a pause in homelessness). 
 - When program time limits mean assistance ends before families can realistically support market rent, families and their landlords are set up for failure. Years of data from the Rapid Re-Housing program show that 12 months is not long enough for families exiting shelter to independently support market rent.
 - When subsidy levels are too shallow, families need multiple assistance programs to maintain housing, which is not an efficient use of resources. An early assessment of the DC Flex program found that many participant families needed ERAP in addition to the \$7,200 annual DC Flex subsidy to avoid eviction.
- Prioritize preserving existing affordable housing because preservation is faster and cheaper than building new housing.
 - E.g. Increase the percentage of HPTF funding dedicated to preservation projects to at least 30% per year. 
- Improve the attractiveness of DHCD financing for DC-based affordable housing projects (compared to neighboring jurisdictions) by increasing efficiency and predictability of the awards process.
- Make all HPTF application submissions and how they were scored publicly available. 

Increase Opportunities for Upward Mobility So More DC Families Can Attain Independent Stability

- Invest in benefits cliff mitigation as part of upward mobility, including releasing data on implementation of DHS's Career MAP pilot and assessing program efficacy. 
- Improve coordination across agencies with existing workforce development programs to identify and address service gaps.

- E.g. DOES, OSSE, and DDS should coordinate with DHS to connect TANF recipients with jobs through their workforce development programs.
- Ground policies in the recognition that, in DC right now, a full-time minimum wage job does not equal a “good” job. Too many of our benefit programs measure whether participants have any job but not whether that job pays enough to sustainably support their family.

Improve Support for Children Who Do Enter DC’s Foster Care System

- Increase the number of appropriate placements available for youth with higher level support needs, large sibling groups, trans youth, and pregnant and parenting youth.
- Implement new, individualized ways to support 18+ youth in care.
 - E.g. Support successful implementation of the Support, Opportunity, Unity, Legal Relationship (SOUL) Amendment Act of 2025.

Every child deserves a strong foundation of HEALTH.

All families want their children to be healthy. However, sometimes health outcomes are shaped not only by medical conditions, but also by the circumstances in which a family lives and the level of care they are able to access and afford. In the District, unsafe housing conditions, exposure to trauma and violence, and a lack of access to appropriate healthcare services can all harm children's physical and behavioral health.

As the new Mayor responds to mounting financial and policy pressures in our healthcare systems, their administration must ensure families can access care when they need it, while also investing in services that prevent adverse outcomes.

To connect more DC children with a strong foundation of health, the new Mayor should:

Strategically Invest in and Deploy Enforcement Tools to Correct Health-Harming Housing Conditions

- Significantly increase investment in the Nuisance Abatement Fund so DOB can swiftly correct unsafe and dangerous housing conditions. 🚀
- Fund and implement the Proactive Inspection Program Act of 2023 to ensure DOB is conducting meaningfully prioritized, comprehensive proactive inspections. 🚀
- Ensure all DOB housing inspectors are certified by DOEE to conduct mold inspections, that the process for mold inspections and mold inspection requests is the same as standard DOB housing inspections, and that DOB housing inspectors are conducting rigorous mold inspections. 🚀
- Require collaboration between DC Health, DOEE and OAG in response to elevated blood lead levels to ensure speedy identification of lead sources and prevention of further exposure, including by requiring prompt remediation and requiring landlords to make temporary comparable alternative arrangements for the relocation of the entire family as appropriate.
- Reduce rodent infestations and promote safe and effective rodent abatement in the District through targeted use of the Nuisance Abatement Fund, thoughtful implementation of pilot programs and public information campaigns and publicly accessible tracking dashboards.
- Increase the timely collection of fines for housing code violations by requiring collaboration across DOB, OAH and CCU to establish why such a high percentage of

finer is not collected and implement changes that will improve enforcement of DOB fines.

- Implement procedures for DLCP to verify whether any beneficial owners have outstanding fines and/or unabated Notices of Infractions from housing code violations when determining whether to issue Basic Business Licenses (BBLs).

Strengthen the Sustainability of Healthcare Services DC Children Use

- Increase needed clinical/licensed and paraprofessional healthcare workforces by:
 - Integrating paraprofessionals (e.g. CHWs, doulas, care coordinators) into DC's healthcare systems;
 - Leveraging Medicaid funding to supplement cost of integration of paraprofessionals, including a State Plan Amendment (SPA) for community health workers; and,
 - Adopting licensure reforms that make health professional licensing easier to obtain.
- Support businesses and individuals providing needed healthcare services to ensure the availability of a variety of providers to meet residents' physical and behavioral health needs. This includes exploring opportunities for financial, technical and administrative assistance that will make it easier for providers to stay in business.
 - E.g. Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates, in-step with inflation, to support healthcare provider operations and keep much needed services available.
 - E.g. Create a hub for paraprofessionals to engage with peers, receive technical assistance for credentialing and billing Medicaid and access training and learning.
- Improve oversight, accountability and enforcement for the District's Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) to improve key priorities like network adequacy and care coordination in the District.

Improve Access to Healthcare Services

- Continue to invest in key navigation resources, including LinkU and DC Map, that help parents/caregivers and healthcare providers navigate complicated physical and behavioral health systems for children.

- Resume the managed care carve-in of behavioral health services which will cut health care costs over time and strengthen oversight of the provider network's billing practices.

Maintain Health Insurance Coverage for DC Children and Families

- Require DHCF to proactively monitor and enforce the implementation of 12-month continuous Medicaid coverage for children to prevent improper losses of coverage as new renewal cycles for adults are implemented.
- Prioritize Medicaid coverage for the family unit – parental/caregiver loss of coverage and associated risks to health has direct ripple effects on children's health and safety.

Every child deserves a strong foundation of EDUCATION.

District schools do not adequately or reliably meet the needs of students with disabilities or children living in poverty. As a result, these students lag behind their peers academically, are disproportionately excluded from school through suspensions and are less likely to graduate. The cost of failing these children is high—both for them and for our community. The District must do more to ensure that all DC students have meaningful access to a high-quality education.

DC's rates of chronic absenteeism reflect the significant unmet needs of students. Students can't learn when their basic needs aren't met. Housing insecurity, unreliable transportation, untreated behavioral health concerns, other manifestations of poverty all contribute to school disengagement. To ensure academic success, the District must provide a robust continuum of supports that meets students' diverse needs.

To connect more DC children with a strong foundation of education, the new Mayor should:

Support School Engagement by Addressing Students' Unmet Needs

- Create an absenteeism response system that identifies the student's unmet needs, develops an individualized plan to connect the student and their family to the relevant supports, and provides regular follow-up to monitor progress or adjust the plan.
 - E.g., Make the DHS Truancy Pilot Program permanent and strategically expand its capacity to support students.
- Improve implementation of home and hospital instruction programs (HHIP) to preserve school engagement for students with health conditions that prevent regular, in-person attendance at school.
- Fund and implement the Education Continuity for Students in the Care of DC Amendment Act of 2025 to ensure that court-involved students stay engaged with their education despite repeated school changes.

Prioritize Reform of Special Education in DC Schools

- Convene a working group of government and community partners to develop a comprehensive plan for reforming DC's provision of special education.
- Ensure that DC's education sector provides a robust continuum of supports for students with disabilities including, but not limited to:

- Improve access to early intervention services through intentional collaboration between healthcare providers, early childhood educators, OSSE and DCPS;
- Ensure schools have the procedures and staffing necessary to complete timely evaluations and eligibility determinations;
- Invest in the staffing and resources necessary for OSSE-DOT to provide safe, reliable and appropriate transportation for eligible students with disabilities;
- Strengthen the related service provider workforce to ensure that students receive consistent service provision;
- Prioritize secondary transition planning and increase collaboration between schools and RSA; and,
- Appoint new leadership in DCPS's Office of General Counsel to shift culture and prevent the use of litigation to delay access to special education. 🚀

Stabilize the School-Based Behavioral Health (SBBH) Program

- Maintain a minimum grant amount of \$120,000 for Community Based Organizations (CBOs) providing SBBH services.
- Develop transparent accountability metrics for both DBH and CBO clinicians.
- Accurately landscape both the needs of each school community and their existing resources to make data-informed decisions regarding deployment of our limited clinical workforce.
- Evaluate the SBBH program on a yearly basis to inform continuous improvement.
- Expand capacity in schools to improve coordination of SBBH programming.
- Invest in building and sustaining a pipeline for the SBBH workforce.
- Expand mental health consultation offerings in applicable schools to support both student and staff well-being.
- Maintain investment in the implementation of the Child Behavioral Health Services Dashboard Act of 2024.

The District government needs a strong foundation of COLLABORATION, TRANSPARENCY, & ACCOUNTABILITY.

Whether the government works well shapes the lives of residents — for better or worse. An unreliable bus makes us late for work or school. A utility rate increase strains household budgets. Inaccurate Medicaid eligibility determinations lead to worse health outcomes. When agencies and programs fail to meet their most basic promises, DC residents lose trust in government as a whole.

In recent years, Children’s Law Center has observed agencies’ reluctance to share data and program information with the public, with Council and even with each other. As a result, it is difficult to engage in an honest assessment of existing programs. New leadership creates an opportunity to shift the culture within DC government. From day one, the new Mayor should set expectations for agencies regarding collaboration, transparency and accountability.

To demonstrate the Executive’s commitment to collaboration, transparency and accountability, the new Mayor should:

Encourage Cross-Agency Collaboration and Partnership

- Appoint agency Directors with a commitment to collaboration.
- Develop automatic systems for information sharing and coordination across agencies.
- Leverage the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children to investigate issues within CFSA and across the various agencies supporting DC children and families.
- Strengthen collaboration between agencies and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) providing government services to DC residents.

Commit to Government Transparency

- Publish all outstanding agency reports and evaluations required by statute or regulation, funded by public dollars or otherwise promised by the Executive. 🚀
- Comprehensively assess agency reporting requirements to determine where reporting is duplicative or unnecessary. For all necessary reporting, move towards streamlined reporting and ensure all such reports are timely published going forward.
- Direct every agency to partner with Council and relevant community stakeholders to identify data it would be helpful to make publicly available in a regularly updated format and fund the technology infrastructure needed to make it happen. 🚀

Reconceptualize Accountability as an Opportunity for Continuous Improvement

- Evaluate the District's contracting and procurement procedures to identify and address sources of delay.
- Develop clear protocols for when and how the District will respond when contractors fail to meet expectations.
- Foster a culture within the Executive that focuses on outcomes, acknowledges shortcomings and rewards problem-solving.
- Ensure no agency Director holds more than one position. 