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TANF/POWER Funding Explainer

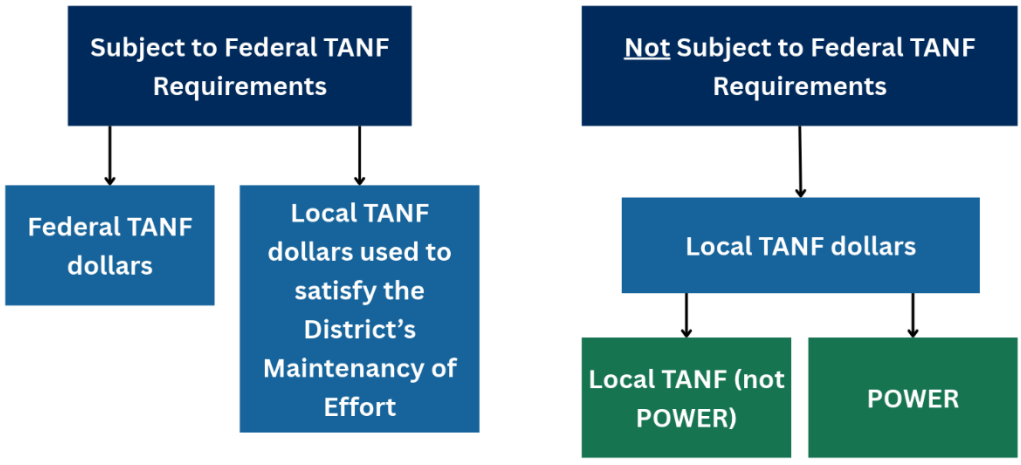
November 2026

TANF Funding in the District

Under current law, three primary buckets of funds support the District's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program – federal dollars, local dollars that are used to satisfy the District's Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirements, and completely local dollars (sometimes called "local, local" dollars). TANF recipients who receive funding from one of the first two buckets must comply with federal rules, including work requirements and time limits on benefits receipt. Those who receive funding from solely local dollars – those that are not used to meet the District's MOE requirement – are not subject to these rules. Thus, the District decided to support individuals who cannot comply with work requirements for good cause or receive TANF for five years with these local funds.

The solely local dollars are further divided into two buckets – (1) local TANF dollars and (2) the Program on Work, Employment, and Responsibility) POWER. Both buckets of local dollars support recipients who would otherwise be eligible for TANF but do not meet work requirements or have received TANF for five years or more.

TANF and POWER Funds in the District



Families Supported by Local TANF Dollars

Families whose benefits are funded by local TANF dollars (not POWER) are in the TANF program. They are subject to, and can be sanctioned for, failing to comply with work requirements, but they are not currently subject to time limits on their receipt of benefits.

Families in POWER

Families apply for POWER through the TANF application process in which the District uses the same "factors, standards, and methodology for determining eligibility for TANF," except for the provisions of the statute that lay out specific POWER requirements and prohibitions.[1] D.C. Code § 4–205.72(a); See, e.g., D.C. Code § 4–205.72 (e) (specifying that, among other provisions, D.C. Code §§ 4-205.11a (dealing with time limits on federally funded TANF benefits) and 4.205.19a through 4-205.19f (dealing with work requirements and sanctions) do not apply to POWER recipients). The statute requires that POWER benefits are calculated according to D.C. Code § 4–205.52 (the statutory provision setting TANF benefit levels). See D.C. Code § 4-205.78.

It is important to note that families cannot apply to POWER directly – they can only be referred for screening by a D.C. Department of Human Services (DHS)[2] case worker. That is why D.C. law requires DHS to screen for potential POWER eligibility every time a person applies or recertifies for the TANF program and whenever a TANF applicant or recipient raises an issue of "inability [to comply with work requirements] or disability." See 29 D.C.M.R. § 5829.1; D.C. Code§ 4-205.19a.[3]

In order to qualify for POWER, an individual must document that:

- They meet one of the following specified criteria: have disabilities themselves, or are caring for individuals with disabilities;[4] are DV survivors, teen parents under the age **of**

[1] The following requirements are listed in D.C. Code § 4-205, which establishes the POWER program: D.C. Code §§ 4-205.72(b)-(d) & 4-205.72a (specific POWER eligibility criteria); 4-205.73 (POWER application); 4-205.74 (medical review requirement to establish disability); 4-205.75 (redetermination of eligibility); 4-205.76 & 4-205.77 (requirements to participate in activities to achieve self-sufficiency and sanctions for failure to do so that are specific to the POWER program).

[2] DHS funds and administers TANF and POWER.

[3] See Black v. D.C. Dep't of Human Servs., 188 A.3d 840 (D.C. 2018) (helpful explainer of assessment and screening requirements).

[4] If, through a screening or otherwise, it appears that a TANF applicant or recipient may be eligible for POWER benefits under D.C. Code § 4-205.72 due to the person's own physical or mental incapacity, then DHS is required to conduct a "medical review" to determine whether the person is in fact incapacitated. Id. § 4-205.74(a). If it appears that a TANF applicant or recipient may be eligible for POWER benefits under D.C. Code § 4-205.72a due to the need to care for a physically or mentally incapacitated member of the person's household, then DHS must conduct a "review" to determine whether the household member is in fact incapacitated and, if so, whether the head of household is needed in the home. Id. § 4-205.74 (a-1).

19 years old, and/or over the age of 60; or are complying with the work requirements laid out in their Individual Responsibility Plans and are not being sanctioned.[5]

AND

- They cannot comply with federal work and time limit requirements as a result of meeting one of these criteria. See D.C. Code §§ 4-205.72 & 4-205.72a.

Last year, DHS reported that in FY2025 there were 258 households participating in POWER, which represent 486 children.[6] DHS also reported the Agency spent $869,622 on POWER in FY2025. However, the Agency could not report how many individuals applied for but were denied POWER and for what reasons due to DCAS grouping POWER applications under a general term of 'Cash Assistance.' The majority of the recipients of POWER are due to being "medically unable to work for 30 days or longer" and with "needed in home to care for incapacitated child" and "victim of domestic violence" following behind.

We speculate that given the prevalence of disability alone among TANF recipients, these figures do not represent all potentially eligible POWER families. It is likely that due to the way POWER applications work (no direct application; referral only), many families do not know about the availability of POWER. We would encourage the Agency to better align their practices, including interagency coordination with Department of Disability Services, Department of Behavioral Health, and Department of Health Care Finance, to ensure families are better matched with POWER.

[5]It is unclear whether these individuals are currently enrolled in POWER given that there are no time limit cuts. This language was presumably put in place when time limits were first being debated/imposed.
[6] *See* Department of Human Services Performance Oversight Responses, response to Q220, *available at*: https://dccouncil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/DHS-Responses-to-Pre-FY25-POH-Questions-FINAL.pdf. The responses also note number of households and children in FY2023 and FY2024.