



# MAKE ★ ONE ★ CITY ★ POSSIBLE

create opportunities to **live** and **work** in d.c.

The Fair Budget Coalition fights for a just and inclusive District of Columbia through advocacy and organizing and by advancing budget and public policy initiatives which reflect the interdependency of the District's community and economic development systems.

## ★ CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE IN DC ★

DC's growing popularity as a place to live — as witnessed by the city's best-in-the-nation population growth — has added to the challenges many middle and lower-income residents face finding housing. One-third of DC's low-cost apartments (under \$750 a month) have disappeared over the past decade, not because homes were demolished but because their rents went up. Rents are rising faster than incomes for thousands of DC households. Families are facing displacement from their neighborhoods and from all of the connections they have made. Public investments such as streetcars are making some DC neighborhoods more attractive, but the resulting rise in housing costs prevents current residents from staying, enjoying the benefits of these investments, and contributing their talents and tax dollars to the District.

At the same time, funding for housing has been cut more than any almost any other part of the budget, with reductions to first-time homebuyer programs, housing construction supports, rent subsidies, and housing for the homeless. In addition, funding for support services that help vulnerable District residents survive has been slashed in recent years, leaving the victims of crime and people with disabilities without the resources they need.

*We urge Mayor Gray to make the following investments and policy changes to help people afford to live in their community and protect our most vulnerable residents.*

### Investments to Create Opportunities to Live in DC

**1. Reinvest in Core Housing Programs:** Rebuild the strong foundation in affordable housing that the District established over the past decade, but was dismantled in the recession.

- a. Restore \$18 million to the Housing Production Trust Fund, which has used loans and grants to leverage private funds and build thousands of units of housing.
- b. Provide \$6 million to address a looming shortfall in the Local Rent Supplement Program. Without help, the city may have to reduce the already limited number of households benefitting from this program.
- c. Invest \$10 million from the Baseball Community Benefit fund to LRSP and Housing First for chronically homeless families. To date, the baseball fund has not supported any community benefits.
- d. Maintain funding for the Home Purchase Assistance Program.

**2. Housing for Homeless Youth:** With \$2.5 million, DC could provide housing and social services for 250 youth and young adults per year, transitional living for 20 youth, and permanent housing for 25 youth. These amounts would include all of the housing and social service costs. This small investment would yield savings in the long-run, as more youth could be helped to return to their families and the likelihood of homelessness as an adult would decline.<sup>1</sup>

**3. Interim Disability Assistance:** Restore \$4 million that has been cut from Interim Disability Assistance in recent years to allow more than 1,200 District residents who cannot work due to a disability have a modest income to make ends meet. While the IDA grant is small (\$270 per month), it helps residents maintain stability, often by pooling resources and living with others, until their federal disability benefits are approved.

**4. Protect Victims of Domestic Violence:** Restore \$4 million that has been cut from the Office of Victim Services (OVS) to ensure a stable safety net of services for victims and survivors of crime and domestic violence.

<sup>1</sup> *Half of all chronically homeless adults report first becoming homeless as teenagers*



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**5. Maintain Health Insurance for DC Residents:** Access to health insurance is critical to the well-being of DC residents, supporting their ability to keep a job and making sure that illness does not lead an individual or family into a crisis. DC should maintain its public health insurance coverage commitments to current recipients, especially members of the DC Healthcare Alliance Program and childless adults with income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

**6. Protect Senior Nutrition Programs:** The District has the second highest poverty rate for residents age 60 and older in the country and current programs are unable to meet the demand for senior food assistance. The District should prioritize the homebound meal program, which currently has a waiting list of over 200 residents, so it can serve every eligible senior; that eligible seniors are connected to SNAP/food stamp benefits; and that the Commodity Supplemental Meal Program receives adequate funding to grow and serve more than 6,600 seniors each month.

## Policy Changes to Create Opportunities to Live in DC

**1. Establish Anti-Hunger Coordinator for the City:** The District operates a number of federal and local programs to fight hunger, but these services are not well coordinated. Mayor Gray should identify a representative in the Executive Office of the Mayor to meet with stakeholder groups and coordinate hunger and food policies across city agencies.

**2. Address Youth Violence in a Comprehensive Way:** A recent report from the Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaborative Council provides a vision for reducing youth violence in the District. The next step is to create a task force to develop a comprehensive violence prevention plan building off of the recommendations of *Responding to Gang, Crew and Youth Violence in the District of Columbia: a Blueprint for Action*. Mayor Gray should establish such a task force.

**3. Monitor Success of New Child Welfare Pilot:** The District has implemented a new program on a pilot basis to provide "differential response" to allegations of child abuse or neglect. The current response to such allegations is an investigation that may lead to a child being removed from the home. Under differential response, child protection workers make a detailed assessment of the family's situation, the level of risk the child faces, and the kinds of services the family may need. With DC's new pilot underway, DC's Child and Family Services Administration should provide information on the implementation to help policymakers and the public learn from it.

**4. Promote Collaboration Between Housing and Social Service Agencies:** Many Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) and public housing tenants lose their vouchers or get evicted for reasons that can be prevented. The DC Housing Authority (DCHA) lacks a service component to connect these tenants with social workers or other professionals who can assist them in mitigating the circumstances leading to their termination from the program. The Department of Human Services (DHS) has this service component. Through coordination between DCHA and DHS, a significant number of voucher terminations and evictions can be avoided. This will result in decreased pressure on the already stressed shelter system and will prevent some of the cycling in and out of homelessness that occurs even when there are obvious service interventions that would be effective in breaking the cycle.