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**Testimony of Jessica Berger  
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**Before the Committee on Human Services  
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Budget Oversight Hearing Regarding the Department of Human Services**

**April 30, 2026**

Good morning, Chairperson Frumin and Members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Jessica Berger, and I am a Supervising Attorney in the Public Benefits Unit at Legal Aid DC.<sup>1</sup>

Legal Aid DC is a proud member of the Fair Budget Coalition, working for an equitable DC, and of the “TANF is Still a Lifeline Coalition,” a coalition that advocates for the reversal of the harmful cuts to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program set to take effect October 1 of this year. The cuts will be devastating for District residents who rely on the District’s safety net programs, many of whom are Legal Aid clients.

Today, we are seeing the largest attack on the safety net in decades.

In terms of the federal cuts to District residents’ benefits, while the District is required to implement them, how smoothly implementation will go, and whether people will experience wrongful reductions or terminations during the transition period is largely within the District’s control. Adequately funding DHS’s Economic Security Administration (ESA), the department charged with administering District residents’ vital public benefits, is

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<sup>1</sup> Legal Aid DC is the oldest and largest general civil legal services program in the District of Columbia. The largest part of our work is comprised of individual representation in housing, domestic violence/family, public benefits, and consumer law. We also work on immigration law matters and help individuals with the collateral consequences of their involvement with the criminal legal system. From the experiences of our clients, we identify opportunities for court and law reform, public policy advocacy, and systemic litigation. For more information, visit [www.LegalAidDC.org](http://www.LegalAidDC.org).

imperative. Sufficient funding will help ensure that the District's implementation of federal changes is done in a way that does the least harm to District residents.

Most benefit cuts are coming from changes on the federal level and are beyond the District's ability to change course. That is not the case for TANF. The cuts to TANF, set to take effect in October of this year, and which the Mayor proposes cutting even further in FY 2028, are entirely District-led. They can and must be reversed.

Legal Aid submits the following testimony to urge the Council to:

1. Preserve the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for the TANF program for FY 2027, which would cost \$5 million dollars,
2. Reverse the imposition of harsher work sanctions for TANF recipients in FY 2027 at a cost of under \$2,035,584 million dollars,
3. Rescind the cuts in TANF benefits for people who are at or exceeded the 60-month time limit for FY 2027, at a cost of \$12.8 million dollars,
4. Ensure that if the District goes forward with TANF cuts, a hardship policy is codified in the Budget Support Act (BSA), and
5. Increase funding to ESA which, in light of recent federal changes, is tasked to do more to administer people's benefits, but has less funding to do so under the Mayor's proposed budget.
6. Reject the elimination of TANF benefits for people who exceed the time limit, which the Mayor proposes should take effect in FY 2028, and

**The Council Must Reverse TANF Cuts Which Will Devastate District Families.**

In last year's budget, this Council amended the DC Code so that beginning October 1, 2026:

- (a) There will no longer be a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for TANF benefits for FY 2027 through FY 2030,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> D.C. Code § 4-205.52(d-1)(1)(D).

- (b) The penalty for not complying with TANF work requirements will increase from 6% of the total family benefit to 25%,<sup>3</sup> and
- (c) Individuals who have received TANF for 60-months, or more, cumulatively, within their lifetime will see the adult portion of their benefits incrementally cut by 30% in FY 2027, then 50% in FY 2028, and finally by 75% in FY 2029.<sup>4</sup>

Now this administration proposes to impose even harsher cuts to people's benefits, by keeping the 30% time limit reduction this October, and then jumping to a 100% cut in October of 2028.<sup>5</sup>

The impending cuts will be devastating for District families. Families living in the District are already struggling under the current level of TANF assistance. The maximum benefit amount for a family of three – a parent and two children – is currently \$803 per month.<sup>6</sup> This puts a family at about 35% of the federal poverty level, which means they are living in deep poverty.<sup>7</sup> Further cuts will harm District families and push them further into poverty.

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<sup>3</sup> D.C. Code § 4–205.19f(g)(3).

<sup>4</sup> D.C. Code § 4–205.52(c-4).

<sup>5</sup> See Glen Lee, Chief Financial Officer. Fiscal Impact Statement – “Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Support Act of 2026.” April 13, 2026, p. 43, available at: [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bbd09f3d74562c7f0e4bb10/t/69deb3c4cb4a191c9c0e0120/1776202692083/FIS+FY27+Budget+Support+Act+of+2026\\_EOM.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bbd09f3d74562c7f0e4bb10/t/69deb3c4cb4a191c9c0e0120/1776202692083/FIS+FY27+Budget+Support+Act+of+2026_EOM.pdf); Department of Human Services, Pre-Budget Hearing Responses, April 28, 2026, Q. 76, available at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/2243>.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Human Services. *Temporary Cash Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)*, available at: <https://dhs.dc.gov/service/temporary-cash-assistance-needy-families-tanf>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. *2026 Poverty Guidelines: 48 Contiguous States (all states except Alaska and Hawaii)*, available at: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/b1bfa16b20ae9b89d525bc35de7c1643/detailed-guidelines-2026.pdf>; Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE). *Financial Condition and Health Care Burdens of People in Deep Poverty*, July 15, 2015, available at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/financial-condition-health-care-burdens-people-deep-poverty-0>.

## The Council Must Revive TANF COLA to Avoid Benefits Devaluation

If the Council does not act now, all TANF benefit amounts will remain at their current level through FY 2030. There will be no increase in benefit amounts, even though the actual cost of living in the District continues to increase drastically.<sup>8</sup> Pausing the COLA, which currently is at a modest 2.9%, will quickly result in the devaluation of TANF benefits.<sup>9</sup> Things that families regularly use their benefits for, such as rent, food, diapers, school supplies, will become inaccessible as TANF benefits inevitably lose their purchasing power.<sup>10</sup>

By pausing the COLA, the District is setting itself up to repeat history. TANF did not have a COLA from FY 1997 to FY 2014, and as a result, the purchasing power was eroded by 23%.<sup>11</sup> This led to the District implementing much-needed benefit increases to TANF benefit levels for a few years and codifying the annual COLA that is currently in place but is set to pause unless this Council acts.<sup>12</sup> It's imperative that the TANF COLA continues to avoid the inevitable devaluation of benefits that will take place in October for all families relying on TANF, and to avoid the situation that we found ourselves in more than ten years ago.

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<sup>8</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Consumer Price Index for Washington, Arlington, Alexandria*, available at [https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/consumerpriceindex\\_washingtondc.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/consumerpriceindex_washingtondc.htm)

<sup>9</sup> See Tazra Mitchell, DC Fiscal Policy Institute. "TANF Benefits Are a Lifeline for DC Families, and Limits and Cuts Will Do Major Harm." June 6, 2025, available at: <https://dcfpi.org/all/tanf-benefits-are-a-lifeline-for-dc-families-and-limits-and-cuts-will-do-major-harm/>

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> Maria Manansala, DC Fiscal Policy Institute. "Punitive TANF Policies Will Push DC Families with Children Deeper Into Hardship." April 21, 2026, available at: <https://dcfpi.org/all/punitive-tanf-policies-will-push-dc-families-with-children-deeper-into-hardship/>

<sup>12</sup> See *id.* Tazra Mitchell, DC Fiscal Policy Institute. "TANF Benefits Are a Lifeline for DC Families, and Limits and Cuts Will Do Major Harm." June 6, 2025

### The Council Must Rescind Scheduled Cuts for Long-Term TANF Beneficiaries

The reduction of benefits for families at or past the 60-month cumulative lifetime limit will also cause substantial harm to families. Nearly 8,000 households are currently at or past the 60-month time limit, and thus are at risk of having their TANF benefit reduced by 30% in October, under current law, and at risk of losing the entire adult portion of their benefit in October 2027 under the Mayor's proposed budget.<sup>13</sup> This is about half of all households receiving TANF.<sup>14</sup> The cuts are expected to directly impact 15,000 children.<sup>15</sup> Residents living in Wards 7 and 8 and people of color will be hit the hardest, as they make up the majority of TANF recipients; only 1% of TANF recipients identify as white and 94% identify as Black/African American.<sup>16</sup>

The planned cuts could also not come at a worse time. Due to changes in federal law, many families will be experiencing drastic cuts to their other benefits. Many District residents receive both TANF and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and DHS states that thousands are at-risk of losing both benefits in FY 2027.<sup>17</sup> DC is also freezing access to its childcare subsidy, meaning that TANF recipients who lose their

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<sup>13</sup> Department of Human Services Performance Oversight Pre-Hearing Responses, February 23, 2026, Q. 209, available at: <https://dccouncil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/DHS-Responses-to-Pre-FY25-POH-Questions-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Andrea Thomas and Judith Sandalow. *Opinion: D.C. must restore TANF to pull more children out of poverty*. The 51st. February 5, 2026, available at <https://51st.news/opinion-dc-restore-tanf-prevent-child-poverty/?ref=the-51st-newsletter>

<sup>16</sup> See Department of Human Services. *ESA FY 2020-2021 Annual Report*, p. 25. Available at: [https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/publication/attachments/ESA%20Annual%20Report\\_2022.pdf](https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/publication/attachments/ESA%20Annual%20Report_2022.pdf); Department of Human Services Performance Oversight Pre-Hearing Responses, Q. 201.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Human Services, *Post-FY25-26 Performance Oversight Hearing Responses*, Q.14(f), available at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/2105>. DHS could not estimate how many District residents would also be losing Medicaid coverage due to federal changes. *Id.* at Q. 14(e).

TANF benefits and try to go to work, will largely be without childcare options.<sup>18</sup> With the loss of multiple supports at the same time, families and children already living in deep poverty will fall even further behind.

### Increased Work Sanctions and Time Limits Will Not Cut Costs

Planned increases in TANF work sanctions and the reintroduction of time limits are short-sighted policies that will not result in actual cost savings. The harm to families will not only be far-reaching, but it will also not achieve DHS's purported goal of cost savings.

Ten years ago, the District conducted a comprehensive review of the empirical research and had an in-depth working group that concluded that TANF time limits and sanctions harm families.<sup>19</sup>

Nothing has changed since then.

This means that once harsher work sanctions and time limits go into effect in October, families living in poverty are not going to magically lift themselves out of poverty. Research shows that decreases in cash assistance are associated with an increase in children experiencing homelessness.<sup>20</sup> Supporting families through the homelessness response

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<sup>18</sup> The Mayor's proposed budget also fails to sufficiently fund the District's child care subsidy program, which means that a waitlist and enrollment freeze will start as soon as May 12, 2026. DC Fiscal Policy Institute. "A First Look at the Mayor's FY 2027 Budget: Working Against Economic Growth." April 17, 2026, available at: <https://dcfpi.org/all/a-first-look-at-the-mayors-fy-2027-budget-working-against-economic-growth/>

<sup>19</sup> Economic Security Administration, "Recommendations for Development of a TANF Hardship Extension Policy for Washington, DC," Department of Human Services, October 18, 2016, [https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/publication/attachments/TANF%20Hardship%20Report\\_0.pdf](https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/publication/attachments/TANF%20Hardship%20Report_0.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Diana Azevedo-McCaffrey and LaDonna Pavetti, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), "TANF Provisions in House Republicans' Debt-Ceiling-and-Cuts Bill Would Harm Families and Deepen Poverty Among Children." May 4, 2023, available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/tanf-provisions-in-house-republicans-debt-ceiling-and-cuts-bill-would-harm>

system is much more expensive than providing cash assistance to families so they can pay rent. We need to invest in people, not cut the little support that they have to get by.

Cutting TANF is not only going to cause immeasurable harm for the caretakers and children affected by the cuts, but is unlikely to result in the desired cost savings that DHS purports it will. The cuts are short-sighted, and the District will likely be paying for these cuts for years to come.

### DHS's TANF Employment and Education Program (TEP) Has Failed

Legal Aid fully supports improving the TANF program, which for far too long has failed to connect families to meaningful opportunities. The current employment program through TANF, the TANF Employment and Education Program (TEP), is clearly not working and hasn't worked for years.<sup>21</sup> Legal Aid is against imposing harsher work sanctions and revived time limits in general, and particularly against doing so when TEP has failed to fulfill its mission of supporting families.

Today, DHS admits new employment placements are low.<sup>22</sup> TEP service providers have been reduced due to budget constraints and service delivery has slowed down due to staff turnover.<sup>23</sup> There is currently a wait time for District residents to be placed by DHS with a Work Readiness vendor and a Job Placement vendor.<sup>24</sup> Out of every 1,000 work-eligible TANF recipients, DHS places an average of just 2 to 3 people in new employment per month.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Department of Human Services Performance Oversight Pre-Hearing Responses, Q. 15(b)(3). See also Economic Security Administration, "Recommendations for Development of a TANF Hardship Extension Policy for Washington, DC," Department of Human Services, October 18, 2016, [https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/publication/attachments/TANF%20Hardship%20Report\\_0.pdf](https://dhs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhs/publication/attachments/TANF%20Hardship%20Report_0.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Department of Human Services Performance Oversight Pre-Hearing Responses, Q. 15(b)(2).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* Q. 15(b)(3).

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* Q. 227-28.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* Q. 15(b)(2).

TEP clearly needs reform. DHS is cutting TEP funding by \$11.55 million in this proposed budget. However, cutting funding for TEP while still imposing harsher sanctions and time limits is unfair and punitive. Rather than improve TEP's efficacy, the Mayor is choosing to give up on both TEP and TANF families struggling to comply with requirements. Imposing harsher work sanctions when it is a particularly difficult economy and TEP has been--and is -- failing families is unconscionable.<sup>26</sup>

### TANF Cuts Should Not Occur Without a Defined Hardship Exemption Policy

For years, it has been widely known that many families receiving TANF face serious barriers to sustaining employment. These barriers include, but are not limited to, mental and physical disabilities, lack of access to childcare (especially when working nontraditional schedules), lack of access to transportation, and the lack of sustainable employment opportunities that understand the needs of single-parent households.<sup>27</sup> Such barriers require that DHS -- at the very least -- adopt a hardship policy so that there will be exemptions to planned harsher sanctions and time limits to account for the formidable challenges facing certain TANF recipients.

DHS states that the budget includes funding for a hardship policy, which would exempt up to 25% of families, from time limits and work sanctions, but the hardship policy is not mentioned anywhere in the Budget Support Act (BSA), nor has the Mayor described who would qualify for a hardship exemption. This administration has also not described how time limits will be calculated, whether time will only be counted prospectively and not retroactively (as advocates propose), or whether there will be ways to "stop" the clock, such as when there is a public health emergency like COVID-19.

Members of this Council, advocates, community members, and DHS met for over 9 hours in February and March of this year to discuss these very issues. Advocates have proposed

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<sup>26</sup> DHS states that "[b]udget constraints have further reduced local hiring and impacted related sectors -- hospitality, healthcare, law, and administrative services -- industries that typically employ most TEP customers." *Id.* Q. 225.

<sup>27</sup> See Economic Security Administration, "Recommendations for Development of a TANF Hardship Extension Policy for Washington, DC," Department of Human Services, October 18, 2016, p. 10. See also Maria Manansala, DC Fiscal Policy Institute. "Punitive TANF Policies Will Push DC Families with Children Deeper Into Hardship." April 21, 2026.

a detailed hardship policy (for consideration if these cuts are not reversed).<sup>28</sup> Yet, as of today there has been no communication from DHS on how it plans to define a hardship.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, most TANF families have no idea that these cuts are coming. There has been no real outreach to help families or community advocates adequately prepare. There appears to be no screening process in place to ensure that people who would qualify for a hardship exemption do not see cuts to their benefits in October. The haphazard planning surrounding these cuts will be catastrophic for families, all of whom have little to no resources to fall back on.

For all of these reasons and more, we ask that the Council reverse the cuts to TANF in FY 2027 and reject the Mayor's proposed additional cuts for FY 2028. If the cuts are not reversed, we ask that the advocates' definition of a hardship policy be adopted and incorporated into the BSA, and that the cuts are postponed to allow for sufficient time for thorough outreach to affected families.

**The Council Should Increase DHS Funding to Account for New Administrative Burdens and Improve Service Delivery.**

DHS administers vital safety net programs for DC's most vulnerable residents, including TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, Interim Disability Assistance (IDA), and other programs. DHS needs sufficient funding to meet this mission.

The agency is already overextended and not meeting either its internal service delivery goals or its statutory obligations to provide timely and accurate benefits. SNAP error rates in the District are still high;<sup>30</sup> too many applications are still not processed in a timely

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<sup>28</sup> Advocacy Organizations that Participated in the 2026 TANF Working Group Organized by the DC Department of Human Services. *The TANF Reductions in FY27 and FY28 Are Not Informed, Do Not Account for Current Realities in the District, and Will Ultimately Harm Thousands of Children*, April 28, 2026, p. 10-13, available at: <https://childrenslawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/TANF-Working-Group-Response.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Department of Human Services, Pre-Budget Hearing Responses, April 28, 2026, Q. 73, available at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/2243..>

<sup>30</sup> The District's SNAP error rate is currently 19.83%. Department of Human Services Performance Oversight Pre-Hearing Responses, Q. 189.

manner;<sup>31</sup> DHS is still not providing adequate or timely notices regarding people's public benefits;<sup>32</sup> call center wait times are high;<sup>33</sup> and people are still being terminated from benefits that they are entitled to because of untimely DHS processing of documents and recertifications.<sup>34</sup> Yet, the Mayor proposes cutting the call center and eligibility team even further to "right-size" the agency.<sup>35</sup> We are concerned that these problems will only be exacerbated under the Mayor's budget which proposes further cuts to DHS's ESA team, the unit responsible for administering public benefits for District residents.

This coming year, DHS's tasks will become more complicated and expensive. First, DHS must implement SNAP and Medicaid work requirements due to federal policy changes. Data show that implementing work requirements is expensive—sometimes even more expensive than the cost of paying for people's medical insurance. When Iowa implemented SNAP work requirements, the estimated cost to administer the work requirements was \$17 million – 2.5 times more than Iowa would have otherwise spent on SNAP benefits during

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<sup>31</sup> *Id.* Q. 181.

<sup>32</sup> This has been a recurring issue for Legal Aid clients. See Testimony of Hailey Markt, Legal Aid DC, Performance Oversight Hearing Regarding the Department of Human Services, February 26, 2026, available at: <https://www.legalaiddc.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/DHS%20Oversight%20Written%20Testimony%20for%202026%20Part%202%20of%2020-%20Service%20Delivery%20Issues%20H.M.%20LADC.pdf>; Testimony of Haley Hoff and Lisa Meehan, Legal Aid DC, Performance Oversight Hearing Regarding the Department of Human Services, March 5, 2025, available at: <https://www.legalaiddc.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/Legal%20Aid%20Testimony%20-%20DHS%20Oversight%20%28PB%29.pdf>; Testimony of Haley Hoff, Legal Aid DC, Performance Oversight Hearing Regarding the Department of Human Services, February 29, 2024, available at: [https://www.legalaiddc.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/testimony\\_before\\_the\\_committee\\_on\\_housing\\_regarding\\_dhs\\_-\\_haley\\_hoff.pdf](https://www.legalaiddc.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/testimony_before_the_committee_on_housing_regarding_dhs_-_haley_hoff.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Department of Human Services Performance Oversight Pre-Hearing Responses, Q. 15(b)(1).

<sup>34</sup> *Supra*, n. 32. See also Department of Human Services (DHS) Pre-Hearing Oversight Responses, Q. 248(b), 256, 266(2).

<sup>35</sup> Department of Human Services, Pre-Budget Hearing Responses, April 28, 2026, Q. 88, available at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/2243>.

the same period.<sup>36</sup> Georgia had similar experiences with implementing Medicaid work requirements.<sup>37</sup>

Undoubtedly, the increased costs DHS will face in administering SNAP and Medicaid work requirements and other federal changes will be significant. Starting January 1, 2027, in addition to other changes, all Medicaid expansion adults will have to recertify every six months, rather than every year, which will be a massive increase in the workload for DHS.<sup>38</sup> Further, if the Council moves forward with TANF cuts, DHS will take on the additional costs of implementing steeper work sanctions and time limits as well.

Legal Aid is concerned that the Mayor's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2027 fails to account for these looming changes. Instead, the Mayor proposes a budget that would continue the trend that she has advocated for in the last few years: to slash DHS's operating budget, and this year to cut full-time equivalents (FTEs) and funding for the DHS call center, despite all of these changes. The Mayor proposes cutting DHS's operating budget by 7.5% this year, which would result in almost a 25% cut in its operating budget compared to its FY 2024 operating budget. The Mayor also proposes cutting 55 FTEs in DHS's eligibility determination team of the ESA and \$1.85 million from the DHS call center, without explaining how DHS will adequately implement, and respond to residents' needs, with less staff given public benefit changes set to take effect this coming fiscal year.

The Mayor's budget fails to account for the substantial increase in DHS's duties and that this will inevitably harm District residents who rely on public benefits to meet their basic needs. People will fall through the cracks, even more than they already are.

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<sup>36</sup> Lily Roberts, Ctr. Am. Prog., "Work Requirements Are Expensive for the Government To Administer and Don't Lead To More Employment." April 25, 2023, available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/work-requirements-are-expensive-for-the-government-to-administer-and-dont-lead-to-more-employment/>

<sup>37</sup> Andy Miller & Renuka Rayasam, "Georgia's Medicaid Work Requirements Costing Taxpayers Millions Despite Low Enrollment." Kaiser Fam. Found Health News. March 20, 2024, available at: <https://kffhealthnews.org/health-care-costs/georgia-medicaid-work-requirements-experiment-high-cost-low-enrollment/>

<sup>38</sup> Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services, State Medicaid Director Letter (SMD) #26-001, Re: Implementation of "Eligibility Redeterminations," Section 71107 of the "Working Families Tax Cut" Legislation (Public Law 119-21), March 6, 2026, available at: <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/smd26001.pdf>

DHS needs more support, not less, to thoughtfully implement the changes imposed on the District by the federal government, and to accurately implement the TANF changes if the District goes forward with them. Exemptions to SNAP and Medicaid work requirements should be as inclusive as possible, and the burden of proving eligibility for an exemption should not be borne by District residents. Instead, DHS should affirmatively identify people eligible for an exemption as much as possible through passive reviews of information that DHS already has in its system. DHS should do the same regarding hardship exemptions for TANF time limits and increased work sanctions if those go forward.

For all public benefit programs, DHS should incorporate affirmative screening questions for exemptions at every stage of the process – applications and recertifications, as well as be prepared to screen and answer questions as residents come in with questions at drop-in centers and through the DHS call center.

This type of thoughtful, intentional approach to preserve District residents' eligibility for critical benefits will cost money and training, but it is crucial so that DHS can adequately support District residents during these challenging times.

We urge the Council to adequately fund DHS's ESA team so that they can be properly trained and have sufficient resources to administer the public benefits that District residents rely on to meet their basic needs.

### **Conclusion**

We recognize that the District is in a particularly difficult budget year – arguably the most challenging the District has seen in a long time. But the Mayor's solution to the budget crisis is to continue to slash the budget of DHS's ESA unit, the department responsible for processing and maintaining critical safety net benefits for low-income District residents.

If the Council fails to act now, the District is also about to make devastating cuts to TANF, the only monthly cash assistance program for families living in deep poverty. This is a time for the Council to take action that reflects DC's values. This Council must reject the Mayor's budget, which inflicts an unbearable burden on the backs of families who have the least resources to weather this storm. We ask that you be a champion for District residents living in poverty and reverse the FY 2027 cuts to TANF, reject the Mayor's proposal for further cuts in FY 2028, and provide adequate funding for DHS's ESA department to better serve District residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions from the Council.