



DC Women's Agenda

Recommendations to City Leaders, 2010

December 17, 2010

The DC Women's Agenda

The Washington, DC Women's Agenda (DCWA) is a local advocacy and policy coalition that was established in the spring of 2003 and works to promote the advancement, equality and well-being of women and girls in the District of Columbia.

The coalition is made up of a diverse group of advocates, service providers, and individuals who partner together to address issues of social and economic justice that women and girls face on a daily basis living in our community.

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The DC Women's Agenda (DCWA)

DCWA's Goals:

- Support the voices of women and girls in the District of Columbia and work toward their empowerment.
- Educate ourselves and our communities about those issues facing women and girls in Washington, DC and efforts to address them.
- Ensure a membership base and goals that are reflective of the racial, economic, cultural, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the District of Columbia.
- Identify the interdependence of issues facing women and girls and pursue policy approaches that incorporate this understanding of their interdependence.

To accomplish these goals, the DCWA has undertaken a range of efforts through legislative and policy advocacy, public education, communications, and grassroots activism. The DCWA's *Recommendations to City Leaders, 2010* includes recommendations on programmatic and funding priorities for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, childcare, and reproductive health. While this White Paper focuses on three key issues facing women and girls today, the DCWA addresses a number of other issues affecting women and girls including but not limited to housing, safety, healthcare and transparency in government.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE OF THE DCWA WHITE PAPER

The election of a new Mayor and City Council offers the city a renewed opportunity to develop policy and programs to increase opportunities for women, girls and families in the District of Columbia. To that end, the DCWA has developed this paper to be a source of information for officials who may be unaware of the current economic status of women and girls in the District. The White Paper offers national and local statistics, providing decision makers with a data-influenced perspective on the impacts of TANF, childcare and reproductive health on women and girls. The recommendations in this paper have been developed by the people who serve women and girls in the District and with input from the individual women and girls themselves.

We understand that the District is faced with a \$188 Million shortfall for the FY11 budget year and hope this paper will provide some guidance on areas in which to place a priority that can offer long term positive impact on the success of DC women, families and girls. Short-term budget cuts to the programs identified below will dramatically harm the already threatened potential for the self-sufficiency of these populations. We encourage city leaders to develop practical and immediate steps to increase the revenue of the city through strategies including expanding a DC sales tax to a number of services and merchandise that are not basic necessities; taxing the income of DC workers who live outside the District and establishing a new income tax bracket for those with annual taxable income above \$350,000.

SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

- Ensure that TANF adequately supports all district residents as they build a pathway out of poverty towards economic self-sufficiency.
- Provide meaningful educational and training programs that better reflect the needs of recipients and better prepares them for good jobs.

Childcare

- Increase the accessibility and affordability of childcare and childcare subsidies to support the economic security of working families.
- Ensure that DC's childcare system adequately provides for all families, especially for low-income teen parents and families of children with special needs.

Reproductive Health

- Support proven teen-pregnancy prevention programs as well as programs that enable teen parents to stay in school and complete their high school education.
- Reduce barriers to accessible and provide more resources for comprehensive healthcare throughout the District.

CONCLUSION

As the nation's capital, the District of Columbia should serve as a model for our neighboring states and jurisdictions. This includes being a capital city with a reputation for providing those women and girls at risk of unemployment, poverty, or homelessness with numerous opportunities to thrive and become successful in their workplace, communities and personal lives. The issues and recommendations developed herein offer a pathway for women and girls to develop the skills and have access to key services that will enable them to become self-sufficient and build economic security in every corner in the District of Columbia.

If the recommendations in this paper are implemented, women and girls in the District will have a stronger foundation of support that will enable them to build better futures for themselves and their daughters.

INTRODUCTION

Earlier this year, the DCWA published an election guide that included candidate responses to a questionnaire on the key issues that affect the quality of life of women and girls developed from roundtable discussions held in Wards 7 and 8. Building on the concerns raised in the *2010 Election Guide to the Mayoral and DC Council Elections*, the DCWA has developed this White Paper to promote the issues that are of greatest concern to the women and girls we serve. In this White Paper, the DC Women's Agenda calls upon our elected representatives to establish effective leadership, programs, and policies that address the top issues for women and girls in the District in order to ensure that women and their families have access to the resources necessary to not only become self-sufficient but to thrive.

The next sections detail key statistics and background information on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, childcare and reproductive health in the District followed by specific policy recommendations that can help improve the effectiveness of these programs. These policies are interconnected with one another and must be considered as a whole in order to have the greatest impact on the individuals they serve.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Improve TANF to enable families to build a path out of poverty towards economic self-sufficiency.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is an investment in District families that supports them as they prepare for well-paying jobs that can support their families and contribute to the tax base leading to long-term economic stability for families and the District of Columbia. At the current benefit levels, TANF does not by itself lift families out of poverty, nor does it contribute to security if recipients are not also engaged in other relevant public assistance programs, including housing and childcare assistance. Currently TANF recipients are unlikely to be able to pursue sufficient education and training or climb career ladders toward economic security if they languish on waiting lists, experience delays in obtaining assistance, are not aware of other forms of public assistance, and/or are become ineligible for TANF due to sanctions, savings, or lifetime limits on receipt of benefits.

In 2009, an estimated 73.7% of female-headed households in the nation's capital city lived below the federal poverty guideline. With the economic recession deepening, safety net services are critical in order to prevent more women and families from slipping into further poverty. The current maximum monthly TANF benefit for a District family of three is \$428, almost 28 percent below the federal poverty line. Compared to other high-cost cities (e.g., a family of three in Los Angeles can receive up to \$723, while a family in New York can receive as much as \$691 a month¹), DC's TANF benefit fails to provide the support necessary for women and families to move towards self-sufficiency. Furthermore, inflation continues to decrease the adequacy of TANF benefits to meet basic needs. If a cost-of-living adjustment had been in place since 1991, a family of three would be receiving a monthly benefit of \$665 this year.²

TANF was established to serve as a stable foundation of support in order for recipients to successfully build a pathway out of poverty and prepare recipients for jobs that provide a self-sufficient wage. Unfortunately, it is not achieving its mission. Former TANF recipients are often prepared for jobs that pay a minimum wage without benefits. A single mother with a pre-school child would need to work three minimum wages jobs to make ends meet.³ If, however, TANF were fulfilling its intended course, i.e., providing adequate benefit levels, families would be more likely to have stable housing (avoiding periods of homelessness), and to have access to stable childcare and training needed to attain good jobs that will lead to economic self-sufficiency.

¹ Kerstetter, Katie and Joni Podschun. 2009. *Voices for Change: Perspectives on Strengthening Welfare-to-Work from DC TANF Recipients*. Washington, DC: DC Fiscal Policy Institute and SOME, Inc. (So Others May Eat).

² Joni Podschun. 2010. *TANF Issue Paper*. Washington, DC: DC Fiscal Policy Institute and SOME, Inc. (So Others May Eat). <http://www.some.org/docs/TANF%20Issue%20Paper%20_6-10-09.pdf>

³ The Self-Sufficiency Standard for one worker with a preschooler is approximately \$45,000 a year. (Wider Opportunities for Women).

Recommendations

- Expand the TANF program to include help for women to meet the work requirements, specifically women who are victims of domestic violence and single mothers with childcare needs.
 - Improve initial needs assessments for TANF participants. Many who require in-depth services to address work barriers do not receive them. An estimated 20% of DC TANF participants experienced domestic violence in 2008, but less than 1% received domestic violence services from the TANF program's provider.⁴
- Raise TANF cash assistance levels until they are adequate and comparable to nearby states.
- Implement a cost-of-living adjustment to secure the purchasing power of TANF for DC's women and children struggling with poverty.
- Increase funding for the TANF block grant in response to current record-breaking unemployment and poverty.
- Ensure that TANF recipients have access to and are therefore able to pursue training according to skill sets, which will lead to long-term security, rather than siphoning recipients to the most easily available job or work program.
- Provide the same incentives for training and education vendors as for employment vendors who refer TANF participants to work programs.
 - In 2007, review of several years of TANF referrals found that fewer than 10% of adults participating in work-related activities had participated in education and training activities.⁵
- Pass the TANF Educational Opportunities and Accountability Act of 2010, which would expand the list of acceptable work activities and job readiness services.
- Make an effort to continue the subsidized training initially made available through the increase of the TANF Cash Emergency Funds authorized under the Recovery Act.

⁴ Kerstetter, Katie. *Testimony of Katie Kerstetter, Policy Analyst, DC Fiscal Policy Institute, for the Public Hearing on Options for Human Services Programming Available Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*, District of Columbia Committee on Human Services. Washington, DC: DC Fiscal Policy Institute, 2009.

⁵ Ross, Martha, and Brooke DeRenzis. *Reducing Poverty in Washington, DC and Rebuilding the Middle Class from Within*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2007.

Childcare

Increase accessibility and affordability of childcare and childcare subsidies to support the economic security of working families.

All working parents rely upon accessible, affordable, and quality childcare services to assure both job and family security. Affordable childcare is especially crucial for low-income workers. Childcare costs in the District have doubled in the past five years, which creates an incredible budgetary challenge in light of stagnant wages. Quality childcare is the largest expense for families with two or more children. In DC the average annual cost of full-time, center-based care is 52% of the median annual income for a single mother with children under the age of eight.⁶ Funding for childcare subsidies has not kept pace, meaning fewer families are receiving assistance, and those who are receiving help are receiving less assistance while facing rising costs.⁷

The FY2011 budget of the District's current administration dramatically cut childcare subsidies by \$27 million less than FY2007 levels, despite a reported number of over 13,000 children on childcare providers' waiting lists.⁸ Although the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) justified the cut by citing "historical utilization data" that indicated the allocated childcare funds weren't being used, both the approach and interpretation of this data are questionable. The latest DC Market rate survey in 2008 showed that none of the subsidy rates met the 75th percentile of the market rate. The result is a considerable financial gap (\$15-17 in 2008) in the market rate for childcare versus the amount reimbursed by OSSE. Similarly, a 2008 study published by OSSE reported that childcare providers may lose as much as \$986 a month.⁹ In other words, subsidizing childcare at a lower rate forces childcare providers to lose money on every subsidized child they take, reducing the number of slots available to families receiving subsidies and increasing the waiting list. As a result of this reduction in slots, funding for subsidies cannot be fully utilized.

Below-market subsidy rates also impact the ability of childcare centers to improve the quality of their centers through training and contribute to the below living wage that childcare workers earn. For example, in 2008, childcare employees earned on average \$15,391 per year or \$8.84 per hour for classroom aides, which is approximately 142% of the federal poverty level for a single adult.¹⁰ If that childcare worker is a single parent, they teeter on the edge of poverty.

⁶ Washington Area Women's Foundation. "2010 Portrait of Women & Girls in the Washington Metropolitan Area." Pg. 39

⁷ National Association of Child Care Research and Referral Agencies. *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2010 Update*. Washington, DC: NACCRRRA, 2010.

⁸ Washington Area Women's Foundation. "2010 Portrait of Women & Girls in the Washington Metropolitan Area." Pg. 38

⁹ <http://povertyandpolicy.wordpress.com/2010/05/01/proposed-dc-budget-cuts-funding-for-child-care-again/>

¹⁰ Lyons, D. 2008. "District of Columbia Child Care Market Rates and Capacity Utilization: A Study of Family Home and Child Care Center Providers in the District of Columbia." Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy.

Center capacity widely varies for specific populations and area of the city. According to a 2008 study by the UDC Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy, less than 10% of the District's family home childcare providers and less than 30% of childcare facilities offer slots for children with disabilities. Yet, the Children's Defense Fund reports that 36% of low-income, single-mother headed families have a child with a disability. Wards 7 and 8 have the centers with the lowest total capacity of all the eight wards. Ward 8 has only enough capacity to reach 36.5 percent of resident children under five, while Ward 7 has capacity for 41.0 percent.¹¹ These populations have the greatest need for affordable and quality childcare, not only for the economic stability of the family but for the children themselves who need specialized care.

Access to affordable and quality childcare naturally has a dramatic impact on the workforce. Seventy-one percent of single mothers with children under eighteen work.¹² Childcare subsidies can significantly improve the likelihood that women transitioning from welfare to work will escape poverty.¹³ Studies have found that single mothers with young children who receive childcare assistance are 40 percent more likely to still be employed after two years than those who do not receive such assistance.¹⁴ Furthermore, childcare break downs cause 45 percent of parents to miss at least one day of work every six month and 65 percent of parents to be late for work or leave work early. This is especially problematic for low-wage, hourly employees who not only losing wages but lack job security and thus face a higher likelihood of being terminated for missed hours and/or days.

Recommendations

- Increase funding for childcare subsidies with a focus on decreasing program waiting lists.
- Raise provider payment rates and reimbursement rates to at least the current 75th percentile of market providers.
- Ensure childcare placements specifically for the children of low-income teen mothers.
- Improve customer service at the Office of Early Childhood Development and the Early Child and Education Administration.
 - Reduce barriers that prevent families from receiving childcare assistance by streamlining the application process. For example, improve the intake process by implementing mandatory customer service training for front line OECD and

¹¹ Office of Early Childhood Education DC, Office of the State Superintendent of Education. "Child Care Profiles." 2009. Washington, DC: OSSE.

¹² US Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2009. "Employment Status of Women by Presence and Age of Youngest Child, March 1975-2008." <<http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-table7-2009.pdf>> (accessed September 13, 2010).

¹³ Danziger, S.K., E.O. Ananat, and K.G. Browning. 2004. "Child Care Subsidies and the Transition from Welfare to Work." *Family Relations* 53 (2): 219-228.; Henry, Colleen, Misha Werschkul, and Manita C. Rao. 2003. "Child Care Subsidies Promote Mothers' Employment and Children's Development." Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. <<http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/G714.pdf>>

¹⁴ Matthews, H. 2006. "Child Care Assistance Helps Families Work: A Review of the Effects of Subsidy Receipt on Employment." Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

ECEA employees to improve service and increase access by scheduling weekend and evening intakes for the voucher program.

- Provide disability-friendly childcare facilities for children with special needs who are currently transported out of the District to facilities in Maryland or Virginia, and use the transportation savings to build greater capacity for these children within a District-wide childcare system.
- Support community childcare providers in addition to a comprehensive pre-k DCPS plan to ensure that parents have a choice and that local small business owners aren't forced to close their doors.
- Facilitate collaborative relationships with local colleges and universities to leverage students seeking degrees in Early Childhood Education, Social Work, etc. Many programs require classroom experience and could potentially bridge the gap for human resource funding.

Reproductive Health

Women and teen girls need affordable and accessible reproductive healthcare.

Women need quality and affordable reproductive healthcare as well as health education in order to make sound reproductive choices and lead healthy lives. Women of all ages require regular reproductive health checkups whether or not they have children but many healthcare plans do not cover the care women need. Access varies greatly depending on where an expectant mother lives in the District. In Wards 7 and 8, less than half of women received care in the first trimester.¹⁵

Teen girls are especially in need of access to affordable reproductive health services. Currently, teen pregnancy and birth rates in the District are on the rise even though they are already more than twice the national average.¹⁶ This is especially true for DC's teenaged Latinas, who are the most likely to have babies - 115 per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19; followed by Non-Hispanic Black girls - 65 per 1,000 births and Non-Hispanic White girls - 3 per 1,000 births.¹⁷

Nationally, 70% of all pregnant teens drop out of school.¹⁸ Subsequently, a teen parent will likely have lower earnings and will spend more time in poverty than those who put off childbearing until later in life.¹⁹ As reproductive health choices play a key role in the general well-being and economic security for many young women, the District needs to ensure that all women have access to quality reproductive care and that all girls are educated on how their choices will affect their futures.

Recommendations

- Fund and implement only rigorously evaluated, evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention models (both primary and subsequent pregnancy prevention) that can be implemented within the school system as well as throughout the community (e.g., Metro system, public libraries, ward-specific collaboratives, etc.).
- Support increased fund residential programs and childcare placements that ensure low-income teen parents can stay in school and get their high school diplomas.
- Reduce barriers to accessible and comprehensive healthcare for teens.
 - Ensure that teens can get contraceptive services from the provider of their choice even if that means going outside of their primary medical coverage.

¹⁵ US Bureau of the Census. *Population Estimates 2006*. District of Columbia State Center for Health Statistics. NeighborhoodInfoDC, Urban Institute.

¹⁶ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. 2010. *State Profiles*. <<http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/state-data/state-profile.aspx>>.

¹⁷ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. 2010. *State Profiles*. <<http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/state-data/state-profile.aspx>>.

¹⁸ <http://connected.waldenu.edu/issues-in-education/school-health-and-safety/item/776-how-many-pregnant-teens-drop-out-of-high-school>

¹⁹ Hoffman, Saul D. 2006. *By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing*. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/BTN_Full.pdf>.

- Expand prescription authority for pharmacists to include contraceptives so that teen girls can get oral contraceptives, Depo-Provera contraceptive shots, and emergency contraception from the pharmacist.
- Increase the number of contraceptive methods accessible over the counter at pharmacies in DC. Make contraceptives free and easily accessible.
- Seek collaborative partnership and funding from the US Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health and Office on Minority Health for marketing and outreach campaigns for teens.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations in this White Paper outline the programmatic and policy changes needed to build a strong foundation of support that will enable women and girls to become self-sufficient and move towards economic security. Central to this foundation is a TANF program that adequately supports women and girls as they develop skills that can lead to careers that provide self-sufficient wages, an affordable childcare system that enables women to work, and access to reproductive health and education that fosters positive reproductive choices.

In light of the recession and current fiscal challenges, it is critically important that we strengthen the policies and programs that support our most vulnerable population, which will ultimately lead to long-term economic stability for the District. The DCWA looks forward to working with the Gray Administration and City Councilmembers on developing effective programmatic policies and strategies to ensure that all women and girls have the opportunity to thrive. We hope that we can serve as a resource and partner in advancing the equality and well-being of women and girls throughout the District.