

DHS Director Laura Zeilinger Profile

Many people throughout our country and in our community are one paycheck away from experiencing homelessness. It is really something that could happen to more people than anyone could ever imagine.

I'm Laura Zeilinger. I am Director of the Department of Human Services. I am very excited to be leading up a department that is really charged with implementing Mayor Bowser's vision to bridge the opportunity gap in our community. Ensuring that people have their basic needs met, food security, income, access to employment and Job training as well as the stability of a place to go when they have a housing crisis and to transition back in our Community. DHS is a very big agency. We have a lot of really passionate and talented staff. Excited to get on board with being a part of that vision and really working differently on behalf of vulnerable residents in our community.

I first started working on Homelessness as part of Mayor Fenty's administration. First in the office of the City Administrator and then as Deputy Director at the Department of Human Services. From there I have had the great Honor of being a part of the Obama administration most recently heading up the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

I feel like the mission of the Department of Human Services is one that is really about social Justice. It is really about meaningful engagement that allows people to have access to the type of services and education that will allow them to grow their income; that will provide them with the safety and stability to have their basic needs met in order to really engage in and do that, I think it is important to be a role model for my daughter that you can make meaningful change and have a big job as a woman and be a mom, and I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to be that kind of example for my children and really instill those values.

There are a number of things i'm really excited to see through at DHS. We're in the midst of transforming the way we deliver public benefits, transitioning from a very old main frame system to one that is modernized where people will be able to Apply for benefits online and do a lot of things that they are walking in our service centers and waiting in line to do much more efficiently and effectively. The time is really right to really make meaningful change on behalf of residents that may not have had the opportunity to benefit from some of the growth and development and change we've seen in our community in the District.