

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**



Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Director

Before the
Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Human Services
Brianna K. Nadeau, Chairperson

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Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good afternoon, Chairperson Nadeau, members and staff of the Council, and members of the community. I am Laura Zeilinger, Director of the District of Columbia Department of Human Services (DHS). I am pleased to testify before you today regarding the Department's Fiscal Year 2020 proposed budget.

Last month, Mayor Bowser presented "A Fair Shot," the Fiscal Year 2020 (FY2020) Budget and Financial Plan, the District's 24th consecutive balanced budget. This budget does more to make Washington, DC a place where people of all backgrounds and in all stages of life are able to live and thrive by making key investments in infrastructure, education, affordable housing, health and human services, economic opportunity, seniors, and public safety. These investments reflect the key priorities identified by District residents at Budget Engagement Forums and telephone town halls held during this year's budget formulation process.

Truly empowering people to have a fair shot at accessing opportunity requires ensuring that they are able to meet their fundamental needs and access the supports and services that allow them to prosper. This is why we are making continued investments in strategic priorities so that homelessness becomes rare, brief and non-recurring. We seek to accomplish this by creating a system of care for youth; supporting families in the TANF program to help grow their economic security and thrive; continuing public assistance for those in need; and improving customer service.

Investing in the *Homeward DC* Plan

In alignment with our strategic plan to end homelessness, *Homeward DC*, the Mayor's FY 2020 Budget provides \$37 million to grow investments in the solutions that we know work to end homelessness. In addition, we are making \$45 million in new capital investments. This is Mayor Bowser's fifth budget funding the Plan building on the more than \$100 million in growth



in our annual operating budget made by the Mayor and the Council over the past four fiscal years.

Building on Successes Ending Homelessness for Families

This budget includes critical new investments to continue the transformation of our system of care for families who experience homelessness. We know what works, and our strategies are producing meaningful outcomes for families. We ensured year-round access to emergency shelter so families can be served regardless of the temperature outside. We invested in prevention services so families can get the help they need without a shelter stay. We closed and replaced DC General to dramatically improve the experience families have in shelter. We are connecting families to housing opportunities specific to their needs as we continue to build out practices around coordinated housing placement and progressive engagement. Because we are building a system of care that works, there are 528 families in emergency shelter today compared to 1,055 at this time three years ago – a reduction of almost 50 percent.

To continue to support exits from shelter, the Mayor’s FY20 Proposed Budget includes \$6.3 million for 180 new Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) vouchers and accompanying services and \$2 million for 80 new Targeted Affordable Housing (TAH) vouchers, which will help DHS provide a continuing subsidy for families who require ongoing intensive services to maintain their housing. The FY20 Budget also includes resources to account for increases in rent costs and limited extensions for families in rapid rehousing.

Thanks to the leadership of the Mayor and this Council, we opened three new Short-Term Family Housing programs this past fall, which positioned us to finally close DC General. No longer are families subjected to a warehouse-type setting. Instead, we are focused on providing the services that families need to get back on their feet quickly in a welcoming and dignified



setting, while providing services that reduce the length of stay in shelter. The Mayor's FY20 Budget includes \$11.2 million to operate and provide wraparound services at these programs and the soon-to-be-opened sites, realizing the promise of smaller, service-enriched programming.

Finally, the budget includes close to \$800,000 to continue funding the agency's Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP), which has prevented over 6,000 episodes of homelessness for District families. As a system, we are supporting a record number of people who are facing a housing crisis as compared to previous years. And it is with great pride that I say that so many of these people never enter the shelter system at all.

Ending Homelessness for Unaccompanied Adults through Shelter, Services, and Housing

We are also on a path to enhance crisis response and connections to housing for unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness. Consistent with *Homeward DC*, our initial focus has been on supporting individuals with the highest level of vulnerability to obtain permanent housing. We have done that: approximately 5,000 single adults exited the streets or shelter to permanent housing since the launch of the plan, with over half entering housing through PSH. That is a tremendous outcome, creating a life-altering platform for improved wellness for many people. However, we know as a community we have not seen the expected corresponding decrease in homelessness among unaccompanied adults. To make the needed progress, we are taking a systems approach to shelter, services, and housing.

With significant investments in DHS infrastructure in the Mayor's Capital Budget, we will continue to improve conditions in our single adult shelters. In FY20, the District is investing an additional \$8 million, on top of the \$40 million appropriated last year, to design and build a new 801 East Men's Shelter on St. Elizabeth's Campus. The facility, which represents a new



vision for low-barrier shelter, will provide differentiated services to meet the diverse needs of our customers, include space for daytime services and programming, and be better equipped to provide medical care and case management supports. We know this is an overdue and needed improvement. We are also investing an additional \$30 million, on top of over \$20 million last year, to not only create permanent supportive housing for women, but also replace the Harriet Tubman Shelter for women on the Hill East campus. In addition, during FY20, we are investing another \$3 million for the rehabilitation of NY Avenue Men's Shelter.

DHS is in the process of launching Project Reconnect, a diversion/rapid exit program for single adults. As outlined in *Homeward DC*, this front-end program will provide light-touch and nimble supports to help those experiencing homelessness, for the first time, exit shelter quickly and reconnect to their support networks outside of the shelter system. The \$875,000 requested for this program will support approximately 500 individuals. As you know, earlier this year, we launched our Downtown Day Services Center, and we are impressed with the number of clients visiting the center and accessing services. These investments are coupled with increased case management services across the low-barrier shelter system.

Finally, the Mayor's FY20 Budget significantly expands permanent housing resources for unaccompanied adults by adding \$8.8 million for 325 new PSH vouchers with services and \$421,000 for 20 new TAH vouchers. With these investments, we are moving to a system where a resident's arrival at the District-funded daytime service centers or low-barrier shelters will ensure more efficient and effective connections to permanent housing supports.



Enhancing Services for Youth

As you may recall, the Mayor's FY19 Budget made substantial investments to improve and expand the system of services and supports for youth by strengthening families and helping young people find a path to safe and healthy development. Diversion services were funded in the Alternatives to the Court Experience, Parent and Adolescent Support Service, and the Strengthening Teens Enriching Parents programs, also known as ACE, PASS and STEP, respectively. And, consistent with the District's Strategic Plan to End Youth Homelessness, *Solid Foundations*, the Mayor's FY20 Budget includes \$2.5 million in new investments, including new investments for longer-term housing supports in Rapid Rehousing, transitional housing and extended transitional housing. The Department will also ensure the resources needed to sustain the new 24-hour Drop-In Center. We look forward to monitoring the continued progress of our youth-oriented programs while ensuring even more youth have access to a place to call home.

Continued Investments in Supporting TANF Participants

Last year was an exciting and pivotal year for the DHS Economic Security Administration – we fully implemented the District's new TANF program, which embraces a two-generation/whole family approach to supportive services and the cash benefit. I am incredibly proud of what we are doing as a community to chart a new path for serving families. Rather than only focusing on the head of household's employment needs, we recognize that there is a symbiotic relationship between outcomes for children and their caregivers. When children are doing well, parents can focus on realizing their goals. As parents grow their economic security, we see improved outcomes for children. Last April, we eliminated the 60-month time limit, minimized the sanction level to six percent, and eliminated the cash grant step down for those families who received benefits for greater than 60 months. Last October, we launched new



performance-based contracts in our TANF Employment Program (TEP) to link more directly to better outcomes for families.

Finally, we are adding specialized programming to the DHS Office of Work Opportunity to serve families for whom a traditional TEP provider may not be the best fit. We continue to leverage relationships with both community partners and sister agencies, including the Workforce Investment Council and the Office of the State Superintendent. Every day, I am reminded that success for a single family, which is our collective goal, is not predicated on a single provider or a single agency, but all of us as a community working toward that common and collective goal. And I am glad that the agency will continue to invest in this shared goal through FY20.

Continued Investments in the Customer Experience

Customer service is foundational to our mission, and during the last year we have made significant changes at our ESA Service Centers. We continue to refine the business process redesign that launched in all five Service Centers in 2017 – today, 85 percent of customers who visit a center have their benefits fully processed that same day, as compared to 15 percent of customers two years ago. Since July, our Centers have opened at 7:30 a.m. instead of 8:15 a.m., which has helped alleviate – although not eliminate – long lines in the early morning. More recently, we began testing a ticketing system at the H Street Service Center so that customers no longer need to stand in line to be registered. This also allows us to more accurately measure wait times from point of entry. The outlook of this ticketing process appears promising. We are also administering a customer service survey so we can hear directly from our customers about their experiences.



We still have work to do to improve the customer experience, but we are taking concrete steps to get there. Looking ahead, Release 3 of the DC Central Access System (DCAS) is in development, and that will include the ability to submit online applications. In addition, we know that exceptional customer service requires investing in our staff through compensation, development and training, and ensuring people can remain upwardly mobile in their careers.

Bolstering Continuum of Support through Agency Alignment

We are also working toward strengthening the support system for vulnerable adults. As part of the *Adult Protective Services Transfer Amendment Act of 2019*, the Adult Protective Services (APS) Division of DHS will transition to become a part of the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL), formerly the Office on Aging. While APS serves all adults, nearly three-quarters of cases are among adults 60 years of age and older. Integrating APS and DACL is an opportunity to create a more unified continuum of services and supports for seniors and vulnerable adults. This structure will also facilitate a close connection between identifying trends around exploitation and the implementation of preventive measures that will enable the District to more proactively reduce risks of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults and seniors. I look forward to working with DACL Director Laura Newland to continue our shared work.

Investing in What Works

In closing, the resources allocated to the Department of Human Services will play a critical role in supporting residents' efforts to reach and remain on the pathway to the middle class. The Council and this Committee are critical allies in this effort. I look forward to our continued work together to achieve our shared goals and give all residents a fair shot to benefit from Washington, DC's continued prosperity.



Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions at this time.

