



# UNITED PLANNING ORGANIZATION'S 2024 LEGISLATIVE AND BUDGET ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

United Planning Organization (UPO) believes that everyone deserves to be economically secure and reach their full potential.

UPO was established in 1962 to develop bold ways to provide human services in DC and be a **catalyst for change**. In 1964, as part of the federal War on Poverty, UPO became the designated DC Community Action Agency to **strengthen and support DC residents with low incomes and their communities**.

Today, UPO **Unites People with Opportunities** with a holistic approach that includes early childhood education, youth development, job training and placement, housing, health and wellness, volunteering, and supporting people to advocate for themselves. Our 400+ staff and 400+ volunteers help 50,000+ DC residents each year.

**UPO understands the obstacles and systemic challenges** that prevent thousands of DC residents from achieving economic security. **Our 2024 legislative and budget advocacy priorities** reflect actions that are essential to help DC's residents with the lowest incomes **meet their basic needs and build the foundation for a better life**. This agenda, created by engaging with UPO customers and staff, reconnects UPO with our roots as we demand change.

## EXPAND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Fully fund the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)
- Expand Permanent Supportive Housing to 1,000 more families and individuals
- Adopt and fund the Rapid Re-Housing Reform Act
- Strengthen Rent Control
- Provide a Local Rent Supplement Program voucher to 1,000 households on the DC Housing Authority waiting list

## IMPROVE INCOME SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

- Create a refundable DC Child Tax Credit
- Address the "benefits cliff" by phasing TANF benefits out more slowly when parents go back to work

## INCREASE ACCESS TO JOBS

Place 1,000 residents into subsidized jobs that can lead to living-wage employment

## INCREASE FOOD SECURITY

- Fund Give SNAP a Raise, a 10% increase in benefits
- Fund and Implement the No Senior Hungry Act

## STRENGTHEN CHILD CARE

Improve the Pay Equity Fund for child care teachers and other staff

## REDUCE VIOLENCE

Increase the use of cognitive behavioral therapy and other evidence-based trauma healing services for the people and communities most impacted by gun violence.

# PROGRAM DETAILS

**Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP):** ERAP provides financial assistance to people facing eviction, but the program quickly runs out of money every year, leaving thousands at risk of eviction.

**Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH):** PSH provides housing and supportive services to people facing chronic homelessness. PSH provides housing stability and helps people manage other challenges, like mental health treatment and substance use disorder.

**Rapid Re-Housing Reform Act:** Rapid Re-housing (RRH) provides transitional housing for people facing homelessness but is badly flawed, and it expects participants to afford DC's high rents on their own within 2 years. The DC Council has introduced legislation to reform RRH, including preventing participants from being terminated if they don't have an affordable housing option.

**Strengthen Rent Control:** Rent control helps keep people in their homes but DC's program has many limitations, including that it only applies to buildings built before 1976 and allows rents to rise faster than inflation. Rent control should be extended to more buildings and DC should limit exceptions that allow large rent increases.

**DC's Local Rent Supplement Program:** LRSP provides vouchers so that tenants pay just 30% of their income for rent, making it the best affordable housing tool for

people with extremely low incomes. A 2006 DC task force recommended 1,000 new vouchers per year, but the average has been 400, and even less than that in recent years.

**Give SNAP a Raise Act:** SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps) is in many ways the best food assistance program, but the benefit levels are too low and leave many with an empty fridge long before the end of the month. The DC Council passed legislation in 2022 to raise SNAP benefits by 10%, but it will need new funding to be in effect in 2024.

**No Senior Hungry Act:** The District passed legislation in 2022 to support seniors by requiring a citywide senior nutrition plan, improving food services at the Department of Aging and Community Services, easing application processes for food programs and more. But the bill has not been funded.

**DC Child Tax Credit:** Child poverty fell dramatically in 2021 thanks to a substantial expansion of the federal child tax credit. But that expired in 2022. DC should create its own Child Tax Credit modeled on the federal credit (but probably at a lower level). A bill to create a \$500 child tax credit has been proposed but not adopted.

**Help Families Exit TANF by Addressing the "Benefits Cliff":** DC's TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program provides around \$750

a month for a family of 3, and benefits phase out entirely once a parent earns just \$2,100 a month. This "benefits cliff" can discourage parents from looking for work or increasing their work hours. DC should delay any reduction in benefits for a year after someone finds a job and then phase out benefits slowly.

**The Child Care Pay Equity Fund:** The Pay Equity Fund, created in 2022, provides a salary boost of \$10,000 or more to child care teachers as part of a long-term effort to ensure that child care staff are compensated on par with K-12 teachers. But the Pay Equity Fund does not provide a larger salary to experienced educators, nor does it include any other staff beyond teachers. These limits should be addressed.

**Subsidized Jobs as a Transition to Living-Wage Work:** Better access to living-wage jobs is a critical element of helping residents achieve economic security. Programs that place people into jobs offer a real work experience, provide needed income, and encourage employers to give workers a chance to get a foothold in the job market.

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy:** CBT helps people recognize triggers for self-destructive behavior and offers techniques for responding differently. Culturally sensitive CBT, led by trusted community partners, can help disrupt the cycle of violence by helping people traumatized by violence in their communities and in their lives.