



United Planning Organization's Agenda for Economic Stability

OUR 2025 LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY AGENDA

In the past four years, DC families have gone from unprecedented levels of economic security — thanks to pandemic aid programs — to a point where many are overwhelmed by unaffordable rents and food prices, amidst cuts to local programs. DC's economy is growing, but our poverty rate remained unchanged last year.

UPO calls on the District to develop an Economic Stability Agenda, focused on housing, food, and child care.

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**Safe and
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**Affordable
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SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL

We believe all DC residents should live in decent housing that is affordable to them. Yet the number of residents paying more than half their income on housing has grown in the past decade, and too many renters live in unsafe and unhealthy housing. UPO recommends:

- **Fully fund the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP):** ERAP is an essential tool to keep families together and limit evictions. The Urban Institute estimates that Emergency Rental Assistance needs \$100 million funding to meet the demand.
- **Invest in deeply affordable housing:** The solution to our housing and homelessness challenges is to create more housing affordable to people with incomes under 30% of Median Family Income, about \$50,000 for a family of 4. The District should invest more in programs to build or preserve affordable housing, combined with rental subsidies for those with the lowest incomes.
- **Improve enforcement of housing conditions laws:** Many UPO customers live in poorly maintained buildings with unresponsive landlords. The District should target landlords with the worst records, and ensure there is adequate inspection staff in the Department of Buildings.

ADEQUATE AND HEALTHY FOOD FOR ALL

We believe no DC resident should worry about where their next meal will come from or eat nutritionally inadequate food because that is all they can afford. Yet 30,000 DC households – 1 in 11 – are food insecure, and the rate is especially high for older residents. Access to grocery stores for DC residents living east of the Anacostia River remains much lower than in other parts of DC. UPO recommends:

- **Restore Give SNAP a Raise:** SNAP benefits are not enough to get people through the month, and UPO customers say they are not able to afford meat, dairy and eggs. DC added a supplement to SNAP benefits in 2024 (\$80/month for a family of three) but ended it in 2025. We recommend the District restore this SNAP supplement in 2026.
- **Fund a Grocery Coop:** The District can support grocery access by supporting cooperative grocery stores at a much lower cost than traditional supermarkets, with an employee-owner model.

SUPPORTING ECONOMIC MOBILITY

The “benefits cliff” is a key barrier to the economic progress of residents with low-income. The benefits cliff reflects the fact that moving to work or getting a better job can trigger a large reduction in benefits like food and housing. Research shows that the benefits cliff leads some people to not take a job offer or a job promotion to avoid losing critical public benefits. UPO recommends: the District take the following steps to support economic mobility.

- **Ensure child support gets to families:** Under current policy, families receiving TANF cash assistance keep only \$150 of monthly child support they receive. The rest is kept by the federal and local government. The District should adopt a policy to pass through all child support to families. This would not only ensure child support actually reaches children, it also would incentivize non-custodial parents to pay child support.
- **Adjust phase-out of DC Benefits:** Currently, TANF cash assistance for families with children starts to phase out when a parent earns just \$160 per month, and parents using subsidized child care are required to make co-pays once their income reaches the poverty line (about \$25,000 for a family of three). The District should create a grace period that maintains full TANF assistance when a parent finds work, and it should reduce or eliminate child care co-pays for families with very low incomes.

AFFORDABLE AND QUALITY CHILD CARE

Improving access to high-quality and affordable child care has enormous benefits for children, parents, and businesses in the District. High-quality care is essential for healthy child development in the early years, and affordable care enables parents to find and keep work; research shows that when DC parents lack access to child care, they often work fewer hours and turn down job promotions. Limited access to child care costs DC employers \$80 million in reduced productivity and higher turnover. UPO recommends:

- **Protect the Pay Equity Fund:** The Pay Equity Fund is a vital tool to raise the pay and provide health insurance for childcare teachers. The Pay Equity Fund has helped increase the number of childcare teachers, addressing a teacher shortage while also improving the lives of childcare teachers. UPO recommends providing \$80 million for the Pay Equity Fund in 2026, for both salary awards and health insurance subsidies.
- **Increase funding for the childcare subsidy program:** For nearly a decade, DC has provided subsidized childcare to eligible families without maintaining a wait list, but funding cuts in FY 2025 may force the District to create a waiting list. DC should fund the child care subsidy program at \$106 million to serve all eligible families.