



Testimony of

Katie Vinopal

Nutrition Associate, D.C. Hunger Solutions

Department of Human Services Budget Hearing

Committee on Human Services

Council of the District of Columbia

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*An initiative of the Food Research and Action Center*

1875 Connecticut Avenue NW | Suite 540 | Washington, DC 20009 | phone 202.986.2200 | fax 202.986.2525 | [www.dchunger.org](http://www.dchunger.org)

Chairman Graham and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony here today. My name is Katie Vinopal, and I am a Nutrition Associate at D.C. Hunger Solutions, an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center. D.C. Hunger Solutions works to create a hunger-free community and improve the nutrition, health, economic security, and well-being of low-income District residents.

I am here first to testify on the importance of the District's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program in these hard economic times, and to encourage the Committee to support the Income Maintenance Administration's efforts to connect every eligible family to SNAP.

We applaud the efforts of IMA to connect over 130,000 D.C. residents to SNAP. The implementation of the SNAP/Food Stamp Expansion Act of 2009 has enabled many more low-income families to access federally-funded nutrition assistance. Further, I'd like to personally thank Carl Rockheade and Rita Wood-Hinton at IMA for their support of our recent SNAP outreach campaign, which we coordinated in conjunction with the DC EITC Campaign. During this campaign over 40 volunteers prescreened over 1,000 District residents for SNAP eligibility, and submitted over 270 applications.

Further, we applaud Council for passing the SNAP/Food Stamp Expansion Act of 2010, which will ensure that the District implements five months of transitional SNAP benefits for families leaving TANF. Transitional benefits will provide a needed support to TANF-leavers, improve program accuracy, and bring millions of federal dollars into the District. With the draconian cuts to the TANF program, it is crucial that IMA implement this policy swiftly and broadly in order to ensure that families losing income can at the very least automatically receive increased SNAP benefits as they leave TANF.

While there is good news on the SNAP front, we all know that people's ability to thrive or even survive is not based on their ability to collect SNAP alone. As members of the Fair Budget Coalition, and as citizens of the District of Columbia, D.C. Hunger Solutions is deeply concerned about the massive cuts to human services proposed in this budget. We are particularly concerned about the hits to homeless services, suspension of the Interim Disability Assistance Program, and additional major cuts to TANF.

This recession has impacted low-income people disproportionately hard. This is not only because they had fewer resources with which to weather it in the first place, but also because of the continuous cuts to the vital services they need. According to the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, two out of every three dollars proposed to be cut from the budget come from human support services and other low-income programs, although these programs make up only a quarter of the budget. The Department of Human Services budget is hit particularly hard, with a decrease of \$17 million—or 11 percent—from FY2011. It does not have to be this way.

We strongly support Mayor Gray's proposed \$160 million in new revenue increases as part of his approach to address the \$322 million budget gap. We particularly applaud the increase in the income tax for high-earners as this is a shift toward more progressive tax policy, and will provide sustainable streams of revenue for the District in years to come. But these increases do not go far enough. Case in point, Council must increase the Mayor's proposal for homeless services spending by \$20.5 million in order to simply maintain the current level of homeless services and avoid life-endangering cuts.

Cutting services to vulnerable populations during a recession—when they need it most—is a recipe for disaster, and undermines the District's key priorities of education, public safety, and jobs. Children whose basic needs can't be met cannot perform well in school, families sleeping on the street cannot possibly be safe, and people being forced to leave TANF without adequate job training and education cannot possibly obtain jobs to support themselves and their family.

Thank you for your time.

*Respectfully submitted by:*

Katie Vinopal

Nutrition Associate

D.C. Hunger Solutions