



Oversight Hearing, Committee on Human Services
March 15, 2017

My name is Rev. James E. Terrell. I am pastor at Second Baptist Church in Ward 6 and President of the Council of Churches of Greater Washington. I am here today to speak on behalf of Good Faith Communities Coalition on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Though no one is counting, this is the third year I have appeared at these hearings on the same subject.

We applaud the Mayor and the Council for moving the city in the right direction on services for working families and for individuals who have experienced years of neglect in shelter or on the street. Though much remains to be done, progress has definitely been made.

Families living in deep poverty, however, are still waiting for TANF to be restructured so it works as an effective safety net. Once thought to be a one size fits all program, TANF has been proven to be anything but that. Addressing individual capabilities and needs as well as the realities of employment today in the District takes time, particularly for those facing significant barriers to employment.

Given the current disastrous climate for poverty programs at the federal level, the need for a robust safety net is URGENT. For the third year in a row, the District confronts more than 5,800 families with well over 10,000 children aging out of the TANF program. A third one year extension is no longer a credible response. DHS and the Council must deliver and fund a program that works this year.

At least two plans on TANF restructuring have already been presented. One in September 2016 called the "Preferred Option" is from a Working Group convened by the Department of Human Services. The chairman of this committee sponsored an earlier plan.

The “Preferred Option” presents a strong and reasonable approach. Time limits on benefits have been removed. Children’s benefits are preserved even if the parents’ benefits are reduced for non-compliance. This policy will protect the many parents who face extreme hardships, such as domestic violence, serious health problems or simply low-wage jobs in an uncertain job market. And the plan will always protect the children.

The need is URGENT. We strongly endorse the “Preferred Option” and recommend a public hearing as soon as possible so legislation can be passed and a budget funded in this cycle. I don’t want to have to return for a fourth year to testify on this URGENT need.

As faith communities, we honor and embrace all people in our community as children of God. We are hopeful people and we continue to pray: Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten. Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.”

Thank you. We look forward to your continued leadership