

OVERVIEW

District Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	District of Columbia	U.S. Average or Total
Annual (federal-only) block grant amount (for 2024)	\$92,304,203	\$16,488,600,000 (total)
% of TANF block grants spent on cash assistance, 2024	12.3%	21.8%
% families who participated in TANF per 100 families with children living in poverty, 2022-23	N/A	20%
Total # families receiving TANF in 2025	5,881	848,631 (total)
% of cases designated "Child-Only" in 2025	25.9%	39.3%
"Unobligated balance" (or stockpiled amounts, which must be used for cash assistance or admin)		
TANF Funds "unobligated balance," as of 2024	\$58,694,975	\$7,986,470,560 (total)
"Unobligated balance" as share of total block grant amount	63.6%	49.5%
Change (+ or -) in "unobligated balance" from 2023	+\$1,914,979	+\$241,306,628

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S CASH ASSISTANCE (TANF) POLICY

HOW MUCH CASH ASSISTANCE CAN A FAMILY OF THREE RECEIVE?		
Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Maximum benefit allowed</p> <p>What is the maximum monthly amount a family of three could receive in cash assistance?</p>	\$803/month, or 35% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)	<p>Consider increasing the maximum benefit to support families with children during challenging periods.</p> <p>Examples: Maine provides families with \$917/month. New Hampshire provides \$1,333/month.</p>
<p>Recurring benefit increases</p> <p>Has the District of Columbia mandated increases to these amounts, as costs of living increase?</p>	Yes, the District makes annual cost-of-living adjustments based on the change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).	N/A

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Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Deductions for calculation of benefit amount</p> <p>Can parents deduct some earnings or expenses from their income when calculating the benefit amount?</p>	<p>Yes, parents can deduct \$160 as a work expense deduction and then 2/3 of their remaining earnings and out-of-pocket dependent care costs.</p>	<p>The state could consider a larger deduction for a period after family member becomes employed.</p> <p>Example: Rhode Island allows a deduction of 100% of earned income when an adult first gains employment while in the state’s works program, for up to six months.</p>

HOW ELSE DOES THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DETERMINE THE GENEROSITY OF CASH ASSISTANCE?

Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Time limit</p> <p>Does the District of Columbia allow families to receive cash assistance up to the federal limit of 60 months?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Transitional cash benefits for families who become ineligible after receiving cash assistance</p> <p>Will parents and caregivers who are newly ineligible for cash assistance receive additional cash support for a limited period?</p>	<p>No.</p>	<p>Consider providing a portion of the benefit to avoid benefit cliffs and support economic stability.</p> <p>Example: New Jersey provides as much as \$200/month for up to 24 months.</p>
<p>Providing one-time cash payments to families in with specific financial needs</p> <p>Does the District of Columbia provide a formal diversion program to support families with specific short-term needs?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Eligibility for monthly assistance less than six months after a diversion payment</p> <p>Can families who receive diversionary payments apply for monthly assistance within six months afterward?</p>	<p>Yes, families are eligible after three months.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Providing assistance with housing</p> <p>Does the state provide housing vouchers with TANF funds?</p>	<p>No.</p>	<p>Providing housing vouchers alongside cash assistance can ease high costs for eligible families.</p> <p>Examples: Hawaii and Maine provide housing vouchers worth several hundred dollars.</p>
<p>Providing assistance with diaper purchases</p> <p>Does the District of Columbia provide assistance to families with diaper expenses using TANF funds?</p>	<p>No.</p>	<p>Providing assistance with diaper costs provides significant support for families with young children.</p> <p>Examples: New Jersey and Washington provide assistance with diapers for families with very young children.</p>
WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR CASH ASSISTANCE?		
Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Maximum income</p> <p>How much can a family of three earn and still be considered for cash assistance eligibility?</p>	<p>Families can earn up to \$963/month and remain eligible for assistance.</p>	<p>Consider increasing the gross income limit to provide support to more families.</p> <p>Examples: Connecticut's income limit is \$1,221/month, and Minnesota's is \$3,211/month.</p>

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Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Deductions for assessment of benefit eligibility</p> <p>Can families deduct a portion of earnings or some expenses from their income to meet income eligibility requirements?</p>	<p>Yes, parents can deduct \$160 as a work expense deduction.</p>	<p>Consider providing additional deductions, including an earned income disregard (EID).</p> <p>Example: Maryland allows a 20% deduction from gross earned income as part of the Initial Needs Test.</p>
<p>Asset limit</p> <p>How much can a family maintain in savings while still being eligible for cash assistance?</p>	<p>Families may retain up to \$3,000 in checking and savings accounts.</p>	<p>Consider increasing or eliminating the asset limit to support families' retention of savings.</p> <p>Example: Massachusetts has eliminated an asset limit for cash assistance.</p>
<p>Eligibility during pregnancy for parents without children</p> <p>Are pregnant people with no children in the household eligible for cash assistance?</p>	<p>Yes, parents are eligible during the last 3 months of pregnancy.</p>	<p>Consider providing cash assistance earlier in pregnancy to support development and reduce parental stress.</p> <p>Examples: Connecticut and Massachusetts provide cash assistance in any trimester of pregnancy.</p>
<p>Provision of federal TANF cash assistance to immigrant families who are lawful permanent residents (LPRs) *after* five years' residence in US</p> <p>Can parents who hold green cards access cash assistance in the District of Columbia once they have been in the country <i>for five years or longer</i>?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Use of state funds to provide cash assistance to immigrant families who are lawful permanent residents (LPRs) with less than five years' residence in US</p> <p>Can parents who hold green cards access cash assistance in the District of Columbia if they have been in the country for <i>less than five years</i>?</p>	Yes.	<p>Consider using state funds to provide cash assistance to these parents.</p> <p>Examples: New York and Connecticut provide cash assistance to some caregivers before five years' residence.</p>

HOW DOES THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA TREAT CHILD SUPPORT OWED TO A FAMILY APPLYING FOR AND RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE?

Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Child support pass-through</p> <p>Does D.C. “pass through” a portion of the payments received by the state in child support for the family?</p>	Yes.	N/A

WHAT ARE THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA’S WORK REQUIREMENTS FOR CASH ASSISTANCE?

Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Provision of cash assistance to out-of-work parents before they search for a job</p> <p>Does the District of Columbia provide eligibility to parents without a search for employment?</p>	Yes, there is no job search required.	N/A
<p>Counting educational activities as “core” work requirements</p> <p>Does the District of Columbia provide credit for all educational activities, including college, as “core” work activities for cash assistance?</p>	No.	<p>Consider allowing college attendance to count as “core” work participation.</p> <p>Examples: Pennsylvania allows specific types of postsecondary education as exemptions.</p>

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Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Exemption for caregivers of infants</p> <p>Are parents or caregivers caring for a child under twelve months of age exempt from work requirements?</p>	<p>Yes, exemptions apply for single parents of children under twelve months.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Other exemptions from work requirements</p> <p>What are other conditions for exemptions from work requirements?</p>	<p>Other conditions for exemptions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of childcare for children under 6 • Illness, injury, or incapacitation • Care for a family member in the home • Pregnancy in the second or third trimester 	<p>Consider adding other conditions for exemptions, including circumstances relating to domestic violence.</p>

WHICH RESTRICTIONS ON CASH ASSISTANCE HAS THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA EASED?

Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Lifting full-family sanctions</p> <p>Are other family members able to continue receiving cash benefits if an adult does not meet work requirements?</p>	<p>Yes. The District of Columbia will only decrease benefit amounts by 6% as a sanction for noncompliance with work requirements.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Lifting drug felony bans</p> <p>Are persons convicted of drug-related felonies eligible for cash assistance?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Refraining from drug testing applicants or recipients</p> <p>Does the District of Columbia refrain from enforcing drug testing of caregivers who are either receiving or applying for cash assistance?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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Flexibility	Current policy	Potential improvement
<p>Lifting the family cap for a new birth</p> <p>Can families receive additional cash assistance if they have another child while receiving assistance?</p>	<p>Yes, the District never enacted a family cap.</p>	<p>N/A</p>



NOTES ON SOURCES:

TANF state profiles were compiled by extensive review of administrative guidelines including those published in state TANF manuals. Additionally, NCCP researchers referred to enacted state legislative resources.

NCCP gratefully acknowledges the of states' TANF-to-poverty ratios as developed and provided by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities:

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2025, April 11). *AFDC and TANF caseload and poverty data*. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/afdc-and-tanf-caseload-and-poverty-data>

We have drawn on the publication of federal data on states' TANF block grant spending, including financial data, spending allocations, and caseload information:

Office of Family Assistance. (2026, February 10). *TANF and MOE spending and transfers by activity, FY 2024*. Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://acf.gov/ofa/data/tanf-and-moe-spending-and-transfers-activity-fy-2024>

Office of Family Assistance. (2025). *TANF caseload data 2025*. Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://acf.gov/ofa/data/tanf-caseload-data-2025>