

Voices and Choices for D.C. Women and Girls



**Recommendations to City Leaders
2007**

The D.C. Women's Agenda

The Washington, D.C. Women's Agenda (DCWA) is a local advocacy and policy coalition that began in the Spring of 2003 and works to promote the advancement, equality and well-being of women and girls in D.C.

The coalition is made up of a diverse group of advocates, service providers, and individuals who work together to address issues of social and economic justice that women and girls face on a daily basis living in our community. The DCWA is co-chaired by the DC Employment Justice Center and Wider Opportunities for Women.

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The D.C. Women's Agenda (DCWA)

DCWA's Goals:

- Support the voices of women and girls in D.C. and work toward their empowerment;
- Educate ourselves and our communities about those issues facing women and girls in Washington, D.C. and efforts to address them;
- Ensure a membership base and goals that are reflective of the racial, economic, cultural, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the District of Columbia; and
- Identify the interdependence of issues facing women and girls and pursue policy approaches that incorporate this understanding of interdependence.



To accomplish these goals, the DCWA has undertaken a range of efforts through legislative and policy advocacy, public education, communications, and grassroots activism. Our latest effort at public education and advocacy is the document introduced here, the DCWA's *Recommendations to City Leaders, 2007*. Included in the document are recommendations by District advocates for girls and women on programmatic and funding priorities in the following areas: economic security, housing, health, women and criminal justice, safety, leadership and accountability, and girls.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is the purpose of the DCWA White Paper?

DCWA has compiled a paper that encompasses a series of recommendations for the Mayor and Council regarding what is needed for women and girls in the District of Columbia. The paper gives national and local statistics about a wide variety of issues pertinent to women and girls, as well what local programs are available in the District and what women and girls need from these programs that they are not getting. DCWA has put together a set of recommendations of what the District still needs and should be improved upon.

What are the recommendations?

The recommendations are concrete examples of ways the District can make the lives of women and girls better. They are realistic and attainable. The individuals who put together the recommendations work with issues related to women and girls on a daily basis, making them experts in what is needed in the District.

Economic Security

Economic security is a critical component of healthy, stable lives. Lives and families fall apart in the absence of good jobs – ones that pay well, include benefits such as health insurance and paid sick days, and provide flexibility to balance work and family. The foundation to obtaining and maintaining a job is a quality education and strong skills in areas where there is a need and where good jobs exist.



1. Identify areas of growth in the regional economy and prepare women to participate in the region's emerging job markets.
 - a. Enforcement of First Source Agreements
 - Increase and improve oversight of First Source Hiring Agreements and compliance reports.
 - Require employers to file disaggregated wage and benefit information, listing each occupational category and compensation level.
 - Require employers to include actual wages and benefits paid in all compliance reports.
 - b. DOES and Workforce Investment Council
 - Provide adequate work supports including access to quality 24-hour childcare.
 - Make available more vocational education at secondary and post secondary level.
 - Engage in a concerted effort to increase the number of women in apprenticeship programs.

- Offer job training that takes into account the barriers that women face.
- Coordinate with other relevant city agencies.

2. Prepare women and girls for financial independence.

a. Job Training – Programs should seek to:

- Provide trainees with the technical skills they will need to obtain and successfully advance in a career that provides self-sufficiency and income growth.
- Improve the basic education and literacy level of trainees to ensure they can succeed in their chosen career paths.
- Reduce barriers to living wage employment such as lack of affordable housing and childcare, mental and physical health, bad credit and lack of driver’s license, issues relating to literacy skills, and having a criminal record.
- Assist trainees in developing soft skills that will allow them to keep the living wage jobs they obtain and progress in their careers.
- Provide job development support to ensure that trainees have the skills to independently locate and obtain jobs within their career path in the future.
- Link trainees with jobs in high-demand sectors through relationship with employers that pay at least \$11.75 (the District’s new Living Wage), with benefits.

b. Minimum Wage Tied to Inflation

- Raise the minimum wage and index it annually to the cost of living.

c. Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

- Ensure that this income source is well-advertised and secured for the well-being of women and girls in poverty.
- Increase funding to expand the advertising efforts that have been most effective thus far.

d. Increase in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Benefits

- Raise benefit levels until they are adequate and comparable to nearby states.
- Implement a cost of living adjustment to secure the purchasing power of TANF for DC’s women and children struggling with poverty.

e. Education and D.C. Public Schools

- Create a volunteer task force to design permanent, gender-strengthening programs and curricular supplement for the DCPS.
- Create a female-specific volunteer task force to



- design a permanent, inter-agency agenda to promote vocational cross-training programs for females.
 - Create a volunteer task force to explore cross-training programs for teachers from public and private schools with incentives for achievement that may include grants and program-specific funding for female opportunities.
3. Enhance workplace flexibility, especially for low-income working mothers, including affordable child and elder care.
- a. Paid Sick and Safe Days
 - Establish a minimum standard for every worker to have paid days that they can take when they are sick, a loved one is sick, or they need to go through necessary measures to ensure their safety or the safety of a loved one.
 - Workers should not have to fear repercussions for taking paid sick days to care for themselves or a loved one.
 - b. Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)
 - Expand FMLA so that all employees in the District are able to take leave for such circumstances no matter the size of the company they work for or how many hours they work in a given week.
 - Amend FMLA to provide paid, rather than unpaid leave, so that workers are able to take their needed medical leave without fear of losing their income.
 - Broaden the definition of a disability so that more people can access the FMLA.
 - c. Child Care
 - Increase funding for child care.
 - Ensure that child care is accessible and of the highest quality.
 - Improve customer service at the Office of Early Childhood Development and the Early Child and Education Administration.
 - Schedule weekend and evening intakes for the voucher program.
4. Increase availability of good jobs through legislative measure such as the Retail Standards Bill
- a. Availability of good jobs
 - Take legislative action to ensure that new jobs in the District of Columbia provide good wages and benefits and give employment priority to D.C. residents.



Housing

There is not a single jurisdiction in the United States in which a person who works 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, at the prevailing minimum wage can afford

a one bedroom apartment. In addition, Washington, DC is the least affordable state in the U.S. in which to live. More than 52,000 families are on the DC Housing Authority's waiting list for Housing Choice Vouchers and/or Public Housing. The waiting period is estimated at literally 52 years. Most of the households in Public Housing are headed by women and it is believed that the vast majority of the families on the waiting list are also headed by women.

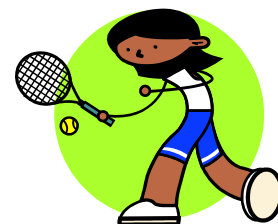


1. Establish affordable housing which will be made available to women, including single mothers.
 - Implement the recommendations of the 2006 “Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force.”
 - Implement a visionary, large-scale effort to develop a minimum of 19,000 affordable units, and 6,000 new units affordable to people who are at 30% of Area Median Income and below.
 - Increase funding for the local Rent Supplement to give Tenant-Based Vouchers to several hundred households and stimulate development of affordable housing for extremely low-income and special-needs persons.
 - Increase the Project-Based and Sponsor-Based portions of the Rent Supplement Program to create housing capacity.
 - Continue local funding for the DC Housing Authority to offset federal losses and keep the Housing Authority Police operational.
 - Unify 8 City agency processes, under the leadership of the District's new Housing Coordinator, to allocate public resources efficiently, identify partner organizations to develop affordable housing units, and put those units on-line quickly. Preserve at least 30,000 existing affordable housing units.
 - Develop supportive housing for residents with special needs.

Health

According to the 2006 Mayor's Health Care Task Force Report, 40% of health outcomes are directly related to behavior, but only 2-3% of our resources are spent on influencing behavior through prevention programs. Prevention is best addressed through education. Fully and comprehensively educating the youngest, most vulnerable females in the District shall in turn protect their adult personal health, and that of any future offspring and/or families.

1. Implement comprehensive health education starting early on and going through high school.
 - Mandate health education standards [with specific emphasis on gender health differences] for all schools, both public and private, in the District of Columbia, beginning with Pre-K and continuing annually through graduation from high school.
 - Implement these standards through a public/private sector collaboration, including the DC Department of



Health, DC Parks and Recreation, and a consortium of DC public and private schools.

- Specifically, emphasis on nutrition for female adolescents, a wide array of physical activity options, and Life Skills programs. Begin these standards as early as Pre-K and incorporate age-appropriate information related to health-wise behavior.
- Secure city-wide media promotion for disease prevention and healthy lifestyles with special focus on Ward-specific needs.
- Support and build upon the investments, cross-cutting, and National Capital Medical Center recommendations cited in the Mayor's 2006 Health Care Task Force Report with specific emphasis on the female population.
- Provide city-wide promotion of current community-based family-strengthening services, including distribution of publications such as the recent *Assessment of District Programs to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect*.

Women and Criminal Justice

Approximately nine thousand residents in the District of Columbia are incarcerated. Eleven percent of these are women. Once a woman has been incarcerated, it is increasingly difficult to break the cycle of incarceration.

Women frequently re-offend because they do not have the structure and support needed once they are released from jail or prison, thereby making it difficult to comply with the demands of a law-abiding lifestyle. The District only has one halfway house for women, which means that many women are released to a shelter or are forced to return to a violent or otherwise unhealthy relationship. Finally, only a few agencies help women who were previously imprisoned, and only one agency works specifically with women.



1. Create services for women coming out of incarceration to help prevent recidivism

- Create Pre-Release Team at DC Jail.
- Issue Mayoral Order announcing RFPs for family-based substance abuse treatment programs.
- Implement Family Unity Demonstration Program (federal legislation providing alternatives to incarceration for mothers with children).
- Implement Federal Certification and initial operation of the Prison Industry Enhancement program (authorized by DC Law 11-117).
- Enact "Human Rights for Ex-Offenders Amendment Act of 2006" prohibiting discrimination based on one's status of previous incarceration.
- Ensure compliance with DC Jail Improvement Act of 2003.
- Appoint to Boards and Commissions individuals sensitive to issues facing formerly and currently incarcerated women.

Safety

Women and girls are a population that is most unsafe in the District of Columbia. Women and girls have the added challenge of dealing with various forms of abuse. This problem affects not only women who may be victims of violence relationships, but also girls who may be victims of child abuse or neglect. These types of violence are often starting points for other problems faced by women such as homelessness, mental illness, drug abuse/addiction, and low self-esteem.

1. Ensure the safety of all women and girls in the District by assessing and revamping necessary programs.
 - a. Domestic Violence
 - Provide funding to increase access to and availability of comprehensive services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and other violent acts against women and girls.
 - Increase public awareness of these services to empower women and girls in the District of Columbia to seek out the services they need.
 - Promote and fund the Commission on Violence Against Women to fulfill the development of comprehensive services for victims of violence against women and to increase public awareness.
 - Ensure that the Commission is comprised of different government agency representatives as well as community-based service providers.
 - b. Child Abuse and Neglect
 - Increase access to jobs that provide self-sustaining wages, job training, good benefits, etc.
 - Develop better programs that educate parents about child development, including support groups for parents to identify with other parents going through the same problems.
 - Increase the mental health services available to children and families.
 - Increase the accessibility to programs so that families and children are able to get the help they need and desire.

Leadership and Accountability

Certain steps need to be taken to place women's issues at the center of government activities. Taking these steps ensures that the District places sufficient importance on the role of women and on the issues affecting women and girls. It further demonstrates to all residents the wide range of options available to women and girls.

1. Establish women in leadership positions in the city administration.
2. Require commitment to women's issues for upper-level position candidates.
3. Empower the DC Commission for Women to enact this comprehensive strategy for women and girls and to monitor performance of executive agencies and their senior management.

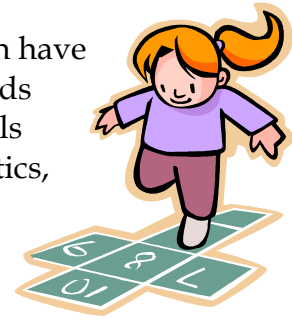
Girls

While girls growing up in this city need comprehensive services beginning at birth, there are some areas that are critical and require specific attention in order to keep them physically and psychologically safe and enable them to become successful women and mothers. With an active, intentional and purposeful focus on girls, beginning at birth and through young adulthood, we will have a positive and lasting effect on women and thereby on our community at large.

1. Establish facilities where girls and young women can go to find refuge and needed services.

a. Safe Spaces

- Establish Safe Spaces, multi-use sites where girls can have access to services and programs specific to their needs and which address the inequities and disparities girls face in education, career development, health, athletics, financial literacy and economics, technology, leadership and being safe in the world.
- In each Ward, establish partnership with existing community organizations, e.g. universities, schools, recreation centers, where girl-serving programs can establish a Safe Space, offering programs such as:
 - Structured after school and weekend programming,
 - Gap programming for school holidays and summers,
 - Triage with mental and physical health care providers,
 - Internships, tutoring (including SAT support), career preparation,
 - Parenting classes and support,
 - Special events and projects to enhance girls' leadership exposure and opportunities to engage with women mentors, and
 - Referral Hotline to special needs programs.
- Develop a Girl Council for each Ward where girls can speak for the needs in their community, meet periodically with women leaders in their community and meet with other Ward Girl Councils to speak for and develop initiatives for girls need city-wide.



b. Services for Girls and Young Women Struggling with Homelessness

- Collect better data on the homeless youth population, runaways, those who have aged out of foster care, street-dependent individuals, and teen mothers.
- Provide a secretive, stable location for all young women under threat of violence in DC, where they can focus their energies on education, job readiness, and counseling. This should include youth experiencing domestic violence and for youth involved in commercial sex work.
- Provide additional youth shelter beds to ensure that any youth who needs a respite from home has an alternative to the streets.

2. Develop services and programs for girls and young women who are at-risk
 - a. Home Based Services for the most at-risk families with children
 - Fund services for the 900 at-risk families not covered by the Healthy Start or Home Based Services programs.
 - b. Teenage Pregnancy Prevention
 - Provide continued support for the teen pregnancy prevention programs already occurring and expand access to these programs.
3. Establish comprehensive education and career development plans for girls and young women.

- a. Head Start and After School Programming

- Encouragement and practice in the study of math, science and technology.
- Increase economic and financial literacy skills.
- Offer opportunities to expand ESL literacy.
- Develop skills in athletics, music and the arts.
- Provide sound information about health issues, including information to prevent obesity, teen pregnancy and STD's.
- Give opportunities to build self-esteem and apply social skills.
- Offer opportunities to develop advocacy and leadership skills.



- b. Positive Youth Development and Social Activities

- Identify and support places where girls can gather and socialize with other girls and with boys in ways that are fun, interesting and developmentally appropriate.

- c. Career Development and Educational Supports

- Develop programs whereby in-school and out-of-school programs are integrated.
- Encourage universities, corporations, foundations, faith-based institutions and government to work together to provide meaningful opportunities for school credits through career and college internships.
- Expose girls to interactive sessions with women in business and other interesting fields. After school programs should include a mentoring and field work component that offers school credit and/or on the job training with the opportunity for hire.
- Provide leadership opportunities through a Girls Council and other activities that enable girls to advocate for their own needs, identify and work on community projects, and participate in activities that result in meaningful change.

Conclusion

The District of Columbia is a very special place. It is the capitol of the richest nation on earth. More than any other jurisdiction, the District should, conceivably, be a place of opportunity and great programs, and a place where all women and girls feel they can grow and be proud of what they do and who they are.

This paper is intended to be a source of education for officials who may be unaware of what conditions are like for women and girls in the District. It is a way for officials to know what is needed in the District and what vehicle will take us to a better place. The recommendations in this paper are not far out of the District's reach. They have been shrewdly developed by the people who serve women and girls in the District and who know their needs the best. They are concrete items that can be changed and improved upon to make the lives for thousands of women and girls better. We ask that the recommendations in this paper be taken seriously and that they be acted on in order to give women and girls what they deserve: a nation restored and hope for their future and their daughters' futures.

INTRODUCTION

The leaders of our city government have a responsibility to demonstrate a clear understanding of the complex challenges of its constituents, institute policies and programs to help them manage those challenges, and establish successful, comprehensive strategies for improving the lives of all women and girls in the city. Establishing effective leadership, programs and policies that address the top issues for women and girls in the District will ensure that they and their families have access to the resources necessary to live with dignity and freedom of choice.

The D.C. Women's Agenda is a coalition of advocacy organizations, service providers, and individuals working to promote the advancement of equality, safety, and well-being for women and girls in the District. Our members work collectively for the creation of policies and programs that address women's concerns, particularly as those of women and girls who are low-income and living in neighborhoods that continue to be under-served and under-represented.

Following are recommendations that members of the DC Women's Agenda have formulated for the District's newly-elected leadership around issues that low-income women and girls experience in their daily lives.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Economic security is a critical component of healthy, stable lives. Individuals and families fall apart in the absence of good jobs – ones that pay self-sufficient wages, include benefits such as health insurance and paid sick days, and provide flexibility to balance work and family. The foundation to obtaining and maintaining a job is a quality education and strong skills in areas where there is a need and where good jobs exist, such as in the areas of math, science and technology. For women and girls in the District of Columbia, unfortunately, both the foundation for economic security and that security itself are in short supply. The school system fails to adequately educate our young women, and the job training programs that exist inadequately position women to obtain good jobs in strong markets. Even when a woman is able to receive the education and training she needs, the jobs themselves frequently lack the kind of flexibility that is so crucial for balancing work and family. The large majority of single parent households in the District of Columbia are headed by women, so women are the ones who suffer by the city's lack of affordable, available child care and the nonexistence of laws requiring employers to provide paid sick days or paid Family and Medical Leave.

- 1. Identify areas of growth in the regional economy and prepare women to participate in the region's emerging job markets.*

Enforcement of First Source Agreements



First Source Hiring Agreements, which are agreements between the District of Columbia Government and businesses that receive economic development subsidies, are intended to increase the hiring of D.C. residents whenever new jobs are created by government-assisted projects. They specify that the employer must fill at least 51% of all new jobs with District residents.¹ The employer is to first seek referrals from the Department of Employment Services (DOES) for qualified personnel. If DOES is unable to fill the request within a reasonable period of time, then the employer has the option of directly filling positions. In that case, however, the employer must still hire 51% District residents for all new jobs created.² If the employer is unable to find sufficient numbers of qualified District residents, they can fill positions with other applicants, but must certify their efforts to find District residents.³ Unfortunately, DOES does not engage in vigorous enforcement of First Source Agreements. In fact, it “has never fined a business for failure to comply”.⁴

In addition, the First Source Hiring Agreements do not provide meaningful wage and benefit information. For example, employers are required only to indicate a salary range.⁵ This allows employers to intermingle entry level positions with upper-level management, making it impossible to determine how many positions pay a self-sufficiency wage. Moreover, there is no requirement that employers include actual wages and benefits paid in their compliance reports.⁶

The lack of enforcement of First Source Hiring Agreements contributes to a higher-than-expected rate of unemployment in D.C. The District of Columbia’s unemployment rate in December 2006 was 6.6%,⁷ 143% of the national average of 4.6%.⁸ In fact, only four states had unemployment rates higher than that of the District of Columbia.⁹ The unemployment rate for the Washington Metropolitan area, however, is 3%, less than half that of the District of Columbia.¹⁰ Meanwhile, thousands of new jobs have been added to the city.¹¹

The D.C. Women’s Agenda urges the Administration and City Council to take several steps to ensure that D.C. residents benefit from the explosive job growth in the area. These will require DOES to better identify eligible, qualified applicants, and to engage in better enforcement of First Source Hiring Agreements.

D.C.’s Department of Employment Services First Source Employment Agreement Program Employer Fact Sheet, http://does.dc.gov/does/frames.asp?doc=lib/does/info/first_source.pdf (visited March 7, 2007), page 1.

² *Id.*

³ First Source Employment Agreement, Section VIII (E)(2).

⁴ Meeting DC’s Challenges, Maintaining Fiscal Discipline Report by the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, 2007, p. 22.

⁵ Economic Development In Washington D.C.: High Costs, Unclear Benefits, Missing Safeguards, Report from Good Jobs First, November 2002, p. 26

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/web/laumstrk.htm> (visited February 20, 2007).

⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/cps/home.htm> (visited February 20, 2007).

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/web/laumstrk.htm> (visited February 20, 2007).

¹⁰ “Local Job Market Rebounds: ‘Real Jobs’ at Profitable Firms Buoy Confidence,” by Amy Joyce, The Washington Post, January 8, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/07/AR2007010700899.html> (visited February 20, 2007)

¹¹ According to the January 8, 2007 Amy Joyce article, “The region added 66,200 jobs [in 2006] compared with 64,700 in 2005.” *Id.* See also WTOP news report that D.C.’s unemployment rates had risen in every sector of the city, at the same time that thousands of new jobs were being added to the District. <http://www.wtopnews.com/?nid=25&sid=519616>, May 16, 2005. (visited February 20, 2007.)

1. Increase and improve oversight of First Source Hiring Agreements and compliance reports.
2. Require employers to file disaggregated wage and benefit information, listing each occupational category and compensation level.
3. Require employers to include actual wages and benefits paid in all compliance reports.

DOES and Workforce Investment Council

The District’s public workforce development system, through DOES and its oversight entity, the Workforce Investment Council, should expand its efforts to engage women in workforce preparation activities and link public services to an analysis of emerging job markets and high-wage careers for the DC Metro Area over the next decade. Issues that must be addressed to enhance successful employment and retention rates for low-income District women include:

1. Adequate work supports including access to quality 24-hour childcare;
2. Vocational Education at secondary and post secondary level;
3. Concerted effort to increase the number of women in apprenticeship programs;
4. Job training that takes into account the barriers that women and other hard to serve populations face, including stereotyping, preparing women for low income, dead end jobs, not addressing their dual roles as workers and the primary caregivers (see additional job training recommendations below); and
5. Coordination with other relevant city agencies.

2. *Prepare women and girls for financial independence, in public school and vocational education, and expand their income and earnings potential through income supports, job opportunities, and access to jobs that pay self-sufficient wages.*



Job Training

The women of Washington are hard workers. According to The Washington Area Women’s Foundation, 65 percent of the region’s women are employed, compared with 57 percent of women nationally. Unfortunately, the picture is bleaker in DC: thirty percent of women-headed families are living in poverty and eleven percent of women are unemployed, almost double the national average of six percent unemployment.¹²

Most of the jobs that many low income people have access to are those that pay a minimum wage and do not include benefits. Those jobs keep working poor persons well below the poverty line and just one small step ahead of homelessness. In fact, 31.6 percent of homeless DC adult residents in families are employed.¹³

¹² “A Portrait of Women and Girls in the Washington Metropolitan Region,” Washington Area Women’s Foundation. [<http://thewomensfoundation.org/images/PortraitFinal.pdf>] 16.

¹³ “Homeless Enumeration for Washington Metropolitan Region,” Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. [<http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/pub-documents/8F1fVg20060619091558.pdf>] 14.

There should be more training opportunities and supports for women among “the working poor.” Many do not make enough to pay their monthly expenses, may lose their jobs and quickly become homeless. They should be able to get training for a job that would provide them with a higher wage and benefits. Funding is needed for job training programs that seek to:

1. Provide trainees with the technical skills they will need to obtain and successfully advance in a career that provides self-sufficiency and income growth.
2. Improve the basic education and literacy level of trainees to ensure they can succeed in their chosen career paths.
3. Reduce barriers to living wage employment such as housing and child care that are too expensive or unavailable, mental and physical health problems, bad credit, and lack of driver’s license.
4. Assist trainees in developing soft skills that will allow them to keep the living wage jobs they obtain and progress in their careers.
5. Provide job development support to ensure that trainees have the skills to independently locate and obtain jobs within their career path in the future.
6. Link trainees with jobs in high-demand sectors through relationships with employers that pay at least \$11.75 (the District’s new Living Wage), with benefits.

Minimum Wage Tied to Inflation

The minimum wage in the District of Columbia is not high enough to support the needs of women and girls. Right now, a person working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year for minimum wage earns only \$14,560 before taxes. This yearly wage is not enough to support even one single person in Washington, D.C., let alone a single mother and her child or children, and 84% of single-headed households in D.C. are headed by a woman.¹⁴ Further, a report by the DC Fiscal Policy Institute reveals that DC’s minimum wage remains lower, after adjusting for inflation, than a decade ago.¹⁵

The women and girls of this city deserve an unwavering assurance that if they work for a living, they will not be relegated to a life of poverty. A single parent would need an income of over \$40,000 to support themselves and a young child.¹⁶ That is the equivalent of \$19.23 per hour – nearly three times the rate of the District’s minimum wage of \$7.00 per hour. In order to ensure that the minimum wage adequately meets the needs of women and girls in the District, there must be a built-in cost of living adjustment – a guarantee that the wage will go up every year commensurate with the cost of living. Without a cost-of-living adjustment attached to the minimum wage, it becomes increasingly difficult with each passing year for workers to stretch those dollars. The \$7.00 minimum wage that went into effect in January 2006 already has lost value. Had it kept pace with a three percent rate of inflation, the minimum wage would now be \$7.21.¹⁷

¹⁴ U.S. Census, *American Community Survey 2005 Data Profile* (visited February 20, 2007).

¹⁵ DC Fiscal Policy Institute, *Meeting DC’s Challenges, Maintaining Fiscal Discipline: Policy Proposals for the New Mayor and Council*.

¹⁶ Wider Opportunities for Women, *The DC Metro Area Self-Sufficiency Standard*.

¹⁷ DC Fiscal Policy Institute, *Meeting DC’s Challenges, Maintaining Fiscal Discipline: Policy Proposals for the New Mayor and Council*.

Working women would be most directly impacted by such a measure. Currently about 32.6% of women working full-time in DC earn less than \$35,000 a year. More striking still, close to 5,000 women who work full-time in the District of Columbia earn the minimum wage or below (\$15,000 per year or less).¹⁸ Thousands of women are needlessly earning a wage that does not allow them to support themselves or their



families. Research has shown that raising the minimum wage does not result in job loss or negative impact on employment. In fact, raising the minimum wage has resulted in higher employee productivity, lower absenteeism, and higher employee retention. Further, providing low-wage workers with a decent wage will reduce the number of working families living below the poverty level, which in turn will reduce caseloads for need-based income support services provided by the government.¹⁹ Amending current law to attach a cost-of-living adjustment to the minimum wage is a straight-forward, necessary, and financially sensible step to ensuring that District residents who work hard are able to support themselves and their families.

1. Raise the minimum wage and index it annually to the cost of living

EITC

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) enhances the incomes of individuals and families that work but have low incomes. Nationwide, the EITC lifts five million children out of poverty each year, more than any other program. It also encourages adults to work by effectively improving the pay rate for part- and full-time jobs. In the District, some 50,000 households receive EITC benefits. The EITC supports working individuals and economic development in DC's lowest-income neighborhoods; about 40 percent of DC EITC recipients live east of the Anacostia River.²⁰

The District of Columbia is one of 17 states that provide state-level EITC to supplement the federal credit. The DC EITC was founded in 2000 and has been expanded twice, making it equal to 35 percent of the federal credit. A parent trying to support two children on a full-time minimum wage job now qualifies for a federal EITC of \$4,400 and a DC EITC of \$1,540. According to the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, "EITC outreach is important to ensure that all eligible families are aware of the credit and know how to apply for it. Research suggests that a significant share of EITC recipients in any given year are newly eligible."²¹ As the cost of living increases in Washington, D.C., women and girls increasingly are struggling with poverty.

1. This valuable income source must be well advertised and secured for the well-being of women and girls in poverty. More money should be allocated to expand the advertising efforts that have been most effective thus far.

¹⁸ U.S. Census, *American Community Survey 2005 Data Profile* (visited February 20, 2007)

¹⁹ Fair Budget Coalition, 2007 Budget Recommendations.

²⁰ Ed Lazere, "Testimony of Ed Lazere, Executive Director, DC Fiscal Policy Institute At the Public Hearing on The Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Request from the Office of Tax and Revenue of the Office of the Chief Financial Officer," 5 April 2006. <http://www.dcfpi.org/4506bud.pdf> [accessed 25 February 2007] 1.

²¹ Ed Lazere, "Testimony of Ed Lazere, Executive Director, DC Fiscal Policy Institute At the Public Hearing on The Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Request from the Office of Tax and Revenue of the Office of the Chief Financial Officer," 5 April 2006. <http://www.dcfpi.org/4506bud.pdf> [accessed 25 February 2007] 1.

Increase in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Benefit

Women make up 90 percent of adult Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients.²² While participation rates among eligible families have been dangerously reduced across the country, those that remain TANF recipients are also facing hard times. Due to the static nature of the federal TANF block grant, the real value of states' TANF allocations has decreased by one-fifth.²³ This results in cuts to child care and TANF benefit levels, and changes in the eligibility requirements for families in poverty.



The District of Columbia recently raised the benefit levels for TANF by 7.5 percent, or an extra \$2 a day for a family of three--the first increase in ten years. Despite the slight improvement, TANF levels remain lower than many states, including Maryland and Virginia. According to the Fair Budget Coalition's Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Recommendation Report, "If you compare DC to the largest city in each state in terms of how well its TANF benefits reflect the local cost of living, DC stands near the bottom: 44th out of 51."²⁴ The TANF benefit for a mother and her two young children is less than \$14 a day. After adjusting for inflation and the high cost of living in DC, it is obvious that the benefit is not adequately providing for DC's poorest families. Of the 15,500 families that receive TANF benefits, nearly 14,000 are women or women-headed households.²⁵

1. Benefit levels should be raised until they are adequate and comparable to nearby states, which would require an increase of 28% over two years, from a benefit level of \$407 for a family of three in 2007 to \$522 for the same family in 2009.
2. A cost of living adjustment should be implemented to secure the purchasing power of TANF for DC's women and children struggling with poverty.

Education and D.C. Public Schools

Thirty-Three percent of single female-headed households in the District of Columbia are living below poverty level. This is one of the highest levels in the nation.²⁶ Ironically, African American women in DC have one of the highest median earnings in the country.²⁷ But for those living in poverty, the direct correlation between a good educational foundation and poverty cannot be underestimated.²⁸

Access to a good education is an important factor in later success and the ability for a woman to be economically self-sufficient throughout her lifetime. Fortunately,

²² "Seventh Annual TANF Report to Congress," the Office of Family Assistance.

[<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/annualreport7/chapter10/chap10.pdf>] X-10.

²³ Kent Weaver, "The Structure of the TANF Block Grant." Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute.

[<http://www.brookings.edu/es/wrb/publications/pb/pb22.pdf>] 2.

²⁴ "Defining Priorities in a Time of Change: Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Recommendation Report." Fair Budget Coalition.

[<http://www.fairbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Final%20report%2012-20.pdf>] 38.

²⁵ Based on enrollment of 90% women nation-wide. See "Seventh Annual TANF Report to Congress," the Office of Family Assistance.

[<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/annualreport7/chapter10/chap10.pdf>] X-10.

²⁶ Institute for Women's Policy Research

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ National Association to Restore Pride in the Nation's Capitol, 2007

drop-out statistics for teens in the District of Columbia were only 1% higher than the national average in 2005, and the rate for students living in the home of a parent who had dropped out of high school was not much higher (6%).²⁹ Female-specific drop-out rates have been highest nationally for Hispanic females, then African American, and lastly Caucasian.³⁰

The alarming statistics of school performance, however, were significant. Fourth graders in the District had over twice the national average for below-average math scores, and about a third of the national average for proficient reading and writing skills. These gaps increased dramatically by 8th grade, when 69% of D.C. students have below-average math skills, compared to 32% of students nationwide.³¹

These poor statistics are not unknown. In 2005, Superintendent Janey presented the *Declaration of Education: A Strategic Plan*, which includes many forceful and appropriate recommendations. However, these strategies represent only the minimal standards for providing any child in the United States with an appropriate public school education. Further, it has been widely publicized that the physical state of our schools is in desperate need of renovation. Long-range efforts to raise the levels of female educational standards in the District to exceed national levels will take undeniable devotion to the cause. First steps must include creative thinking, pragmatic fiscal solutions, and incentives both for students and for teachers.



1. Expand the new Certificate of Employability Program to include identification and promotion of female-specific opportunities
2. Expand the current AmeriCorps partnerships with DCPS to encourage the development of female-specific opportunities in the sciences.
3. Set aside funds from the recent Gates' Foundation for programs to support tutoring and mentoring for females, interfacing with private sector woman-owned businesses as reliable resources to encourage female opportunities
4. Increase the interagency relationships between DCPS, the Department of Employment Services, and the University of the District of Columbia to provide encouragement and direct support for the student female population of the District
5. Creation of a volunteer task force to design permanent, gender-strengthening programs and curricular supplements for the DCPS
6. Creation of a female-specific volunteer task force to design a permanent, inter-agency agenda to promote vocational cross-training programs for females
7. Creation of a volunteer task force to explore cross-training programs for teachers from public and private schools with incentives for achievement that may include grants and program-specific funding for female opportunities

²⁹ KidsCount, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005

³⁰ American Psychological Association, Resolution on School Dropout Prevention, 1996

³¹ KidsCount. D.C. students also have higher below-average skills in reading (55% v. 29% nationwide) and writing (34% v. 16% nationwide).

3. Enhance workplace flexibility, especially for low-income working mothers, including affordable child and elder care.

Paid Sick and Safe Days

Workplace flexibility is a matter of great importance to women and girls in the District of Columbia. Employees should have basic rights when it comes to being able to care for themselves or a loved one. They should have access to paid sick days in order to care for their own sicknesses as well as sicknesses of loved ones, and should be able to use those paid sick days without suffering repercussions at work (probation, termination, and so on). The need for workplace flexibility is especially great for low-income working mothers and those who are victims of domestic violence.



Nearly half of all women who work in the private sector do not have paid sick days, nationwide and in the District of Columbia³² and fifty three percent cannot take days off to care for their children when they get sick³³. The people most likely to need paid sick days are low wage workers, workers with children, and single parents—the very workers who are most likely to not have any. A single mother should not have to choose between a day's wages and staying home to care for her own illness or the illness of her child. For many low-wage single mothers, they cannot afford to miss a day of work and therefore send their children to school sick, which, in turn, infects other children. Or they go to work themselves, which prolongs their illness and also contaminates those working with them. If they had paid days that they could use to take care of themselves when they were sick, they could get healthy quicker and would be more productive when they came back to work.

Victims of Domestic Violence need to have days that they can take off work that are protected and paid as well. A domestic violence victim should not have to choose between going to court to get a protective order for her safety and a days pay. Worse still, she should not have to risk losing her job in order to secure safety for herself and/or her family. She should be able to take paid time off to go to the doctor, attend a court hearing, move her place of residence, and anything else that would be essential to her health and wellbeing.

1. The District needs to allow every worker to have paid days that they can take when they are sick, a loved one is sick, they need to go through necessary measures to ensure their safety or the safety of a loved one.
2. Workers should not have to fear repercussions for taking paid sick days to care for themselves or a loved one.

Family and Medical Leave

Workplace flexibility also means providing greater access to Family and Medical Leave (FMLA). Right now, the FMLA only covers employees that work at least 19

³² Lovell, Vicky. 2004. No Time to Be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers when Workers Don't Have Paid Sick Leave. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Washington D.C. page 6

³³ Institute for Women's Policy Research. Paid Sick Days Fact Sheet. February 2007.

hours per week and for organizations of 20 or more employees. This leaves out a substantial amount of workers. In addition, Family and Medical Leave is unpaid, which is a large barrier to many workers. Most people cannot afford to be out on medical leave while paying medical expenses without receiving an income. In fact, one survey found that nearly three-fourths of workers who were eligible for FMLA did not take it when they needed it because they could not afford to lose their pay.³⁴

Another problem with the FMLA is in the definition of a Serious Health Condition. Under the D.C. FMLA, “serious health condition” is a physical or mental illness, injury or impairment that involves, (A) inpatient care in a hospital, hospice, or residential health care facility; or (B) continuing treatment or supervision at home by a health care provider or other competent individual³⁵. This definition needs to be broadened to encompass other debilitating circumstances that would keep an individual from working. For instance, a sprained ankle would warrant a few days off of ones feet but most likely does not need continuing treatment from a doctor. Another example is an illness that would keep an individual out of work for a given amount of time but that may not need to be monitored regularly by a doctor.



1. FMLA needs to be changed so that all employees in the district are able to take leave for such circumstances no matter the size of the company they work for or how many hours they work in a given week.
2. FMLA should be paid so that workers are able to take their needed medical leave without fear of losing their income.
3. The definition of a disability needs to be broadened so that more people can be helped by FMLA

Child Care

Access to affordable, quality child care is critical for parents – but many D.C. families need subsidies in order to find such child care. Subsidies lead to more work, higher earnings, and a greater likelihood of remaining off welfare. For example, single mothers with young children who receive child care assistance are 40 percent more likely to still be employed after two years than those who do not receive such assistance.³⁶ According to anecdotal evidence, the District follows national findings that “some working families who are unable to access the Child Care Subsidy Program leave work to go on welfare, some back on welfare.”³⁷ Because of the efforts and outcry of D.C. residents, funding for the Child Care Subsidy Program increased in FY 2006 to cover 65 percent of eligible children (from the previous level of 40 percent), but this higher level means that 35 percent of families still lack access to safe, high-quality care.

³⁸

³⁴ Balancing the Needs of Families and Employers: Family and Medical Leave Surveys 2000 Update

³⁵ D.C. Code Sec. 32-501 (9)

³⁶ Courtesy of Empower D.C., www.empowerdc.org/childcare.html (visited March 7, 2007).

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Defining Priorities in a Time of Change: Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Recommendation Report, Fair Budget Coalition, p. 20.

In addition, families without assistance often spend as much as 30 percent of their income on child care or resort to unstable and lower quality child care arrangements.³⁹ This makes it hard for families to meet other basic needs, such as food or rent, and forces them to make difficult choices, such as paying for child care or buying adequate food. In fact, according to Empower DC, “More than three-fifths of families on DC's waiting list for child care report cutting back on other household expenses to meet child care bills.”⁴⁰ Inability to access stable child care also has a dramatic impact on employment. Unstable child care can lead to frequent absences from work or to employees who are distracted on the job. Some parents are forced to quit their jobs to address child care issues.ⁱ Employee absenteeism and turnover can have a serious adverse effect on a business.



Subsidies alone are not enough, though. In some studies, children’s scores on cognitive and language tests were higher when they were in higher-quality child care arrangements.ⁱⁱ Therefore, subsidies need to go to child care that is of the highest quality.

Finally, individuals also should be able to receive excellent service from the D.C. Office of Early Childhood Development so that they can address problems with the subsidies or the child care itself. One way to ensure that is for DC’s Early Care & Education Administration to return phone calls promptly and have available appointments for parents within one week. In addition, ECEA should have regularly scheduled weekend and after 6 PM intake for the voucher program – both downtown and in the community.

1. Increase funding for child care.
2. Ensure that child care is accessible and of the highest quality.
3. Improve customer service at the Office of Early Childhood Development and the Early Care and Education Administration.
4. Schedule weekend and evening intakes for the voucher program.

4. Increase availability of good jobs through legislative measures such as the Retail Standards bill.

Availability of Good Jobs

In order to create a healthy and livable city for women and girls, it is necessary to ensure the availability of sustainable, family-friendly jobs. Women and teenage girls alike deserve to be employed in jobs that provide good benefits and a decent hourly wage, or a wage that includes money for benefits. This can be done through measures such as the Large Retailer Accountability Act for the District of Columbia.ⁱⁱⁱ This piece of legislation demands that retail stores of a specified physical size and with at least \$1

³⁹ Courtesy of Empower D.C., www.empowerdc.org/childcare.html (visited March 7, 2007).

⁴⁰ *Id.*

billion in annual profits meet certain wage and benefit requirements for their employees.

With the passage of the bill, large retailers also will be required to comply with the District's First Source hiring requirement, ensuring that D.C. residents will get access to good, quality jobs. This particular piece of legislation is just one of many steps that ought to be taken to guarantee that development in the District is carried out responsibly. We need to escalate legislative efforts to ensure that news jobs brought to the District are livable, family-wage jobs. Businesses, particularly those seeking government subsidies, need to guarantee that they will provide a certain number of jobs for District residents, and that those jobs will meet minimum wage and benefit standards. Measures like the Large Retailer Accountability Act will ensure that D.C. women who work hard will be appropriately compensated for that work, enabling them to sustain themselves and their families.

HOUSING

There is not a single jurisdiction in the United States in which a person who works 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, at the prevailing minimum wage can afford a one-bedroom apartment.⁴¹ Nationwide, 15.6 million households are paying more than half their incomes for housing.⁴² Unfortunately, the picture is even worse in the District of Columbia. Washington, DC, is the least affordable state in the U.S. in which to live. A worker earning the \$7.00/hr. minimum wage in the District would have to work at least 141 hours per week to afford a 2-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rate.⁴³ While new residents have been attracted to the District in recent years, the consequent surge in housing costs has placed neighborhoods and long-term residents under new stresses. Rental housing costs are increasingly unaffordable to a greater percentage of District households,⁴⁴ affordable rental units are disappearing,⁴⁵ home purchase prices have risen as the District has become one of the nation's hottest housing markets,⁴⁶ and affordable homes for purchase are disappearing.⁴⁷

The situation for individuals in need of public housing is even more dire. More than 52,000 households are on the DC Housing Authority's waiting list for Housing Choice Vouchers and/or Public Housing.⁴⁸ Incredibly, 20,000 of the 52,000 households

⁴¹ National Low Income Housing Coalition: Out of Reach, 2005.

⁴² Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University: The State of the Nation's Housing, 2006.

⁴³ Housing and Urban Development: Fair Market Rents for FY '07.

⁴⁴ Average gross monthly rents for apartments in the District rose from \$440 in 1990 to \$840 in 2003. Only 43% of renting households could afford the \$840 rent – and that was four years ago. Fully 66,430 households in the District make less than half of the Area Median Income and cannot afford local rental prices. National Low Income Housing Coalition: Out of Reach, 2005; DC Fiscal Policy Institute: Squeezed Out, 2005; Housing and Urban Development: Fair Market Rents for FY '07.

⁴⁵ In one year, 2003-2004, more than 2,000 affordable rentals (\$500/month or less) were lost in the District. At the same time, 4,600 high-end rentals came on the market. DC Fiscal Policy Institute: New Census Data Show DC's Affordable Housing Crisis is Worsening, 2005.

⁴⁶ The median cost for a single-family house in the District is now \$489,000 (for a co-operative or condominium, \$377,950). In 2001, a full-time teacher earning a salary of \$45,000 could afford 33% of homes for sale in the District. Three years later, in 2004, and even with a 15% salary increase, that teacher could afford only 17% of homes for sale in the District. The interest declines of 2000-2003 did not offset the impact of skyrocketing prices. Fannie Mae Foundation: Housing in the Nation's Capital, 2005; http://www.dchabitat.org/om_facts.html.

⁴⁷ In one year, 2003-04, more than 9,000 affordable homes were lost in the District. At the same time, 10,800 high-end homes came on the market. DC Fiscal Policy Institute: New Census Data Show DC's Affordable Housing Crisis is Worsening, 2005.

⁴⁸ The waiting period is estimated at literally 52 years. Only about 500 vouchers and about 500 public-housing units are made available in the course of a year.

on the waiting list have registered with the Housing Authority that they are homeless and that they are eligible for a Homelessness Preference for the vouchers.

1. Establish affordable housing which will be made available to women including single mothers.

This housing crisis is very much an issue for women. Most of the households in Public Housing are headed by women, and it is believed that the vast majority of the households on the waiting list are also headed by women. The lack of housing alternatives forces women and men to stay in violent households or to double and triple up with other families, causing constant stress and frequent relocation. Some families literally live in semi-public spaces.



The lack of stability in housing exacerbates all other issues for the individual and her family – such as physical health and mental health, the ability to find and keep a job, and the ability to go to school and concentrate.

1. Implement the recommendations of the 2006 “Comprehensive Housing Strategy Task Force.”
2. Specifically: Implement a visionary, large-scale effort to develop a minimum of 19,000 affordable units, and 6,000 net, new units affordable to people who are at 30% of Area Median Income and below.
3. Increase funding for the local Rent Supplement to give Tenant-Based Vouchers to several hundred households and stimulate development of affordable housing for extremely low-income and special-needs persons.
4. Increase the Project-Based and Sponsor-Based portions of the Rent Supplement Program to create housing capacity.
5. Continue local funding for the DC Housing Authority to make up for federal losses and keep the Housing Authority Police operational.
6. Unify 8 City agency processes, under the leadership of the District’s new Housing Coordinator, to allocate public resources efficiently, identify partner organizations to develop affordable housing units, and put those units on-line quickly. The District should preserve at least 30,000 existing affordable housing units.
7. Develop supportive housing for residents with special needs.

HEALTH AND HEALTH EDUCATION

According to the District of Columbia's Office of Planning, females made up 52.9% of the District-wide population in the year 2000⁴⁹. White females in this group had the highest incidence of breast cancer (slightly higher than the national average) but black females had a much higher incidence of breast cancer mortality (just slightly lower than the national average). Surprisingly, in 1999, the highest DC breast cancer mortality rate was found neither in white nor black females but in American Indian/Asian Pacific Islander women. Overall, women in the District of Columbia ranked first in breast cancer mortality across the nation. Cervical cancer mortality



statistics were just 1/3 of the breast cancer rates with black women in the highest percentile.⁵⁰ Despite DC's staggering emphasis on cancer statistics, the DC cancer rates are not dramatically higher than the nation's. Rather, the #1 "killer" of women in the District of Columbia (and the nation) is heart disease,⁵¹ the least advertised for prevention, diagnosis and/or treatment.

The three main chronic diseases in DC: heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.⁵² Researchers increasingly acknowledge that these prevalent diseases, along with obesity,⁵³ are directly associated with life style decisions, influences, and patterns that begin early in life. According to the 2006 Mayor's Health Care Task Force Report, 40% of all health outcomes are directly related to behavior, but only 2-3% of our resources are spent on influencing behavior through prevention programs.

1. Implement comprehensive health education starting early on and going through high school.

Prevention must be addressed through education, provision of resources, and provision of services. Fully and comprehensively educating the youngest, most vulnerable females in the District shall in turn protect their adult personal health, and that of any future offspring and/or families. Beginning with the education of school-aged females is essential. Presently, it is our weakest link. According to the Center for Disease Control's 2004 Healthy Youth Profiles, only 16% of DC schools offer fresh fruits and/or vegetables for purchase in a school store, canteen or snack bar (compared to 45% for the national average). Only 42.7% schools require a health education course as part of the curriculum (compared to 67.8% for the national average). Since both male and female children and teens in the District have at least 10% higher averages of obesity, promotion of healthy diets should be heavily emphasized through a radical change in school offerings of healthy, living foods and snacks.

⁴⁹ DC Office of Planning, Census 2000, Key Demographic Indicators

⁵⁰ District of Columbia Cancer Incidence and Mortality Report, 1999

⁵¹ 2006 Mayor's Health Care Task Force Report

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ KidsCount State Level Data, 2004



It is obvious that a program incorporating both the school system and community-based resources will be a prudent beginning, coupled with long-range efforts to raise the standards of health and health services for all females in the District. We must not underestimate the ultimate influence of females on securing a healthy District of Columbia.

1. Mandate health education standards [with specific emphasis on gender health differences] for all schools, both public and private, in the District of Columbia, beginning with Pre-K and continuing annually through graduation from high school.
2. Implement these standards through a public/private sector collaboration, including the DC Department of Health, DC Parks and Recreation, and a consortium of DC public and private schools.
3. Special emphasis for females shall include nutrition, a wide array of physical activity options, and Life Skills programs. Again, these standards should begin as early as Pre-K and incorporate age-appropriate information related to health-wise behavior.
4. Secure city-wide media promotion for disease prevention and healthy lifestyles with special focus on Ward-specific needs.
5. Support and build upon the investments, cross-cutting, and National Capital Medical Center recommendations cited in the Mayor's 2006 Health Care Task Force Report with specific emphasis on the female population.
6. Provide city-wide promotion of current community-based family-strengthening services, including distribution of publications such as the recent *Assessment of District Programs to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect* [the appendix of which includes services related to preventive and prenatal care, substance abuse, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS support, etc.]. Distribution sites should include but not be limited to libraries, schools, public service buildings, and police stations.

WOMEN AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Approximately nine thousand residents in the District of Columbia are incarcerated. Eleven percent of these are women. Both numbers are expected to increase drastically over the next several years. Notably, a large majority of incarcerated women are mothers. Sadly, many of these women come from domestic violence situations, and their crimes are directly related to the violence they experience. In fact, it is estimated that fifty-five percent of the women who are incarcerated nationwide were in a violent relationship prior to being incarcerated. Another issue that plagues incarcerated women, also related to domestic violence, is substance abuse. Approximately eighty percent of the women who are imprisoned are convicted on drug or drug-related charges.

The real problem lies in the fact that once a woman has been incarcerated, it is increasingly difficult to break the cycle of incarceration. Women frequently re-offend because they do not have the structure and support needed once they are released from jail or prison, thereby making it difficult to comply with the demands of a law-abiding lifestyle. They also may encounter barriers to employment because of their criminal records, increasing further the difficulties they have in complying with the law.

1. Create services for women coming out of incarceration to help prevent recidivism.

The obstacles that previously incarcerated women face can appear insurmountable, and frequently women are discouraged from the moment they step out of the correctional facility. They frequently **are** released without any clothing, other than their prison jumpsuit. They commonly return to situations in which they are victims of violence. Many struggle to maintain their sobriety on their own because of a lack of treatment or support.



Formerly incarcerated individuals often are denied jobs, housing, and benefits because of their criminal backgrounds; they also may encounter difficulties in reunifying with their children and ingjuggle the responsibilities of motherhood. In the midst of managing all of these demands, they attempt to meet with their Community Supervision Officers (formerly Parole Officers) and comply with weekly drug testing.

Most of these women do all of this with little to no support. As it stands, the correctional facilities do little to assist women with their reintegration into the community. There is only one halfway house for women in the District, which means that many women are released to a shelter or are forced to return to a violent relationship. Finally, only a few agencies help women who were previously imprisoned, and only one agency works specifically with women. Therefore, the D.C. Women's Agenda makes the following recommendations:

1. Create Pre-Release Team at DC Jail: women released in daylight, in civilian clothing (not jumpsuits) appropriate for the weather, and with a release package to include temporary ID card, bus token, condoms, at least two weeks of prescribed medication, and resources for health, housing, and employment.
2. Deputy Mayor for Public Safety should conduct a comprehensive review of length of time women are held in jail before being transferred to court-mandated treatment.
3. Issue Mayoral Order announcing RFPs for family-based substance abuse treatment programs.
4. Implement Family Unity Demonstration Program (federal legislation providing alternatives to incarceration for mothers with children).
5. Implement Federal Certification and initial operation of the Prison Industry Enhancement program (authorized by DC Law 11-117).

6. Pass “Human Rights for Ex-Offenders Amendment Act of 2006,” prohibiting discrimination based on one’s status of previous incarceration.
7. Ensure compliance with DC Jail Improvement Act of 2003.
8. Appoint to Boards and Commissions individuals sensitive to issues facing formerly and currently incarcerated women.

SAFETY

Every woman and girl deserves to feel safe in her own home and community, but women and girls are a population that is most unsafe in the District of Columbia. Women and girls have to deal with the same problems as their male counterparts, but have the added challenge of dealing with various forms of abuse much more frequently than men. This problem affects not only women, who may be victims of violence in relationships, but also girls, who may be victims of child abuse/neglect. These types of violence often are starting points for other problems faced by women such as homelessness, mental illness, drug abuse/addiction, and low self-esteem.

1. Ensure the safety of all women and girls in the District by assessing and revamping necessary programs.

Domestic Violence

One in four women will face abuse from an intimate partner at some point in their lives.⁵⁴ In 2005, the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department received 11,053 calls to report domestic violence crimes. This averages out to approximately 30 calls per day. This number has increased by 22% in the past three years.⁵⁵



There are fewer than 10 staff attorneys in the District dedicated to representing victims in civil cases, and fewer than 5 staff positions in the District that provide domestic violence prevention and community education services.⁵⁶ Funding for such services is necessary so that education and outreach can be done. Within the District, there are approximately 40 case managers, counselors, and advocates assisting victims. This means that, on average, a case manager could have a caseload of 10 to 50 clients per month.⁵⁷ Services provided by these staff are essential to the variety of victim needs; however, there should be more such positions to make sure that each victim is adequately taken care of.

1. Provide funding to increase access to and availability of comprehensive services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and other violent acts against women and girls.

⁵⁴ National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. http://www.ncadv.org/files/DV_Facts.pdf. Visited March 5, 2007

⁵⁵ District of Columbia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. www.dccadv.org/statistics.html. Visited March 1, 2007.

⁵⁶ District of Columbia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. www.dccadv.org/statistics.html. Visited March 1, 2007

⁵⁷ District of Columbia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Domestic Violence in the District of Columbia: What the District Policy Makers can do in Fiscal Year 2008.

2. Increase public awareness of these services to empower women and girls in the District of Columbia to seek out the services they need.
3. Promote and fund the Commission on Violence Against Women to fulfill the development of comprehensive services for victims of violence against women and increase public awareness.
4. Ensure that the Commission is comprised of different government agency representatives as well as community-based service providers.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Another issue which particularly faces young girls is that of child abuse and neglect. Each year, an estimated 896,000 children from around the country are victims of neglect or abuse. In 2002 alone, approximately 1,400 children died from child abuse or neglect, an average of 3 children each day.⁵⁸ In the District of Columbia, 2,889 children fell victim to child abuse and neglect during FY 2006.⁵⁹ Children who are victims of abuse and neglect deal with the direct consequences of the abuse perpetrated on them, and also must deal with long lasting effects of the abuse. They are much more likely to experience delayed development, a wide variety of mental health issues, aggressive behavior, and future substance abuse.⁶⁰ It is estimated that a third of abused children go on to abuse their children as well, continuing the cycle.⁶¹ Child abuse and neglect affect the community as well. In addition to affecting the well-being of members of the community, child abuse and neglect also have substantial costs: combined, they have an estimated direct cost of \$24 billion each year and indirect costs of approximately \$69 billion annually.⁶²

According to the recent assessment done by the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency, there are quite a few gaps in services related to these issues. First, families need more access to self-sustaining employment, job training, and job security. According to a study done by the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, the highest rates of child abuse and neglect occur in the areas with the highest level of poverty.⁶³ Families also need access to affordable housing and other services. Third, there is a lack of Parent Training and Parent Support programs across the District. Additionally, mental health services in the District are severely lacking. Funding received from the Department of Mental Health often is not used to implement services that are of greatest need of children and families. Finally, accessibility to programs and services is often a barrier to families and individuals as well.⁶⁴ Therefore, the D.C. Women's Agenda makes the following recommendations:

1. Increase access to jobs that provide self sustaining wages, job training, etc.

⁵⁸ The National Center for Victims of Crime. www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbName=DocumentViewer&DocumentID=38709

⁵⁹ Child Family Services Agency. 2006. The Assessment of District Programs to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect.

⁶⁰ Rolland, Stacy. 2006. Disparities in the District: Poverty is a Major Cause of Social Problems in the District of Columbia. <http://www.dcfpi.org/?p=163>. Visited on March 5, 2007.

⁶¹ The National Center for Victims of Crime. www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbName=DocumentViewer&DocumentID=

⁶² Child Maltreatment Facts. www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/cmfacts.htm

⁶³ Rolland, Stacy. 2006. Disparities in the District: Poverty is a Major Cause of Social Problems in the District of Columbia. <http://www.dcfpi.org/?p=163>. Visited on March 5, 2007.

⁶⁴ Child Family Services Agency. 2006. The Assessment of District Programs to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect.

2. Develop better programs that educate parents about child development. This should include support groups for parents to identify with other parents going through the same problems.
3. Increase the mental health services available to children and families.
4. Increase the accessibility to programs so that families and children are able to get the help that they need and desire. Any family who wants to help themselves should be able to do so.

LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In order to ensure that the issues outlined below receive the attention they deserve, and in an effort to communicate to the women and girls of the District the importance this Administration and City Council place on their concerns, certain steps need to be taken to place women's issues at the center of government activities. First, women need to be placed in leadership positions in the city administration. Second, this Administration and City Council should institute policies and procedures which require that candidates for top-level appointments demonstrate both a commitment and a plan to advance women in their agencies and an understanding of the issues affecting women and girls in the District, particularly those who are low-income and traditionally disadvantaged. Finally, the D.C. Commission for Women should be empowered to oversee this comprehensive strategy.



1. Establish women in leadership positions in the city administration.

Appointing women to high-level positions is critical in the messages it sends. First, it conveys a message of equality of opportunity, demonstrating to all residents in the District that the city is committed to the economic empowerment of women and girls. It also provides women and girls with role models they can emulate. Further, appointing women to high-level positions is a visual action that can instill women and girls with confidence that they can realistically aspire to positions of power in the city. Making these appointments is important beyond the messages that it sends. It infuses a range of life experiences into the decision-making and leadership ranks of the city, thereby ensuring that the District of Columbia represents all of its constituents.

The District of Columbia is uniquely poised to appoint women to high-level positions in government. Almost half of the women in the region (46%) have earned a college degree, compared to 27% nationally.⁶⁵ This is achievable. In fact, this Administration has an impressive record of appointing women to his highest-level positions. Nearly half of the appointments as of early March 2007 were women.⁶⁶ The D.C. Women's Agenda applauds these efforts and urges the Administration and City

⁶⁵ A Portrait Project of Women and Girls in the Washington Metropolitan Area, report by the Washington Area Women's Foundation (2003), p. 13.

⁶⁶ <http://www.dc.gov/mayor/organization2.shtm>, visited March 7, 2007.

Council to ensure that the remaining positions are filled with a balanced group of men and women.

2. *Require commitment to women's issues for upper-level position candidates.*



Similarly, it is imperative that this Administration and the City Council take concrete steps to ensure that candidates for top-level positions demonstrate their commitment to issues affecting women and girls. This commitment must be an institutionalized part of the D.C. government, so that as women set out on a course to advance themselves, they can have confidence that their efforts will be rewarded in the future. Requiring top-level appointees, whether male or female, to demonstrate an understanding of issues affecting women and girls in the District will give women and girls confidence that the people in charge of issues of importance in their lives understand their

lives and can be relied on to serve them well.

In the District of Columbia, 30% of women-headed households live in poverty, above the national average (27%) and the highest in the region.⁶⁷ As stated previously, eighty-four percent of D.C.'s single-headed households are headed by women.⁶⁸ Holding candidates for top-level appointments accountable to hiring women in high-level positions and to demonstrating that they understand issues of importance to women and girls in the District will play an important role in shifting the quality, quantity, and range of critical services directed toward these women. In addition, many issues may appear to be gender-neutral, yet in fact, have more serious implications for women and girls in the District than they may have elsewhere. For example, here in D.C., the rate of new AIDS cases among adolescent and adult women is 92 per 100,000, which is 10 times the national rate.⁶⁹ Leaders in charge of all services must understand the situation of women in regards to their issues and services.

3. *Empower the DC Commission for Women to enact this comprehensive strategy for women and girls and to monitor performance of executive agencies and their senior management.*

Appointing women to leadership positions and requiring all candidates to demonstrate an understanding of issues affecting women and girls is not sufficient, however. The District of Columbia has a Commission for Women that soon will have staff, and is poised to take on this role. Having such a clearly articulated strategy also is new in the District, making this the perfect time to build in oversight.

Commissions for Women around the country undertake a wide range of activities. These include conducting studies, implementing service programs, and

⁶⁷ The Portrait Project, *supra*, at 14.

⁶⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Data Profile 2005, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=31200US479001150000&-context=adp&-ds_name=ACS_2005_EST_G00_&-tree_id=305&-lang=en&-caller=geoselect&-format= (visited March 7, 2007).

⁶⁹ A Portrait Project, *supra*, at 43.

advocating for legislation. The D.C. Commission for Women anticipates engaging in these same activities, and members are hopeful that they will be able to do so once they have staff to support their volunteer efforts. Giving the D.C. Commission for Women an oversight role would be consistent with this Administration's commitment to management accountability and would be a new and creative use of these experts at the service of the city. Once the funding and staff for the D.C. Commission for Women is in place, the Commission can start planning for oversight, including finalizing the agenda, setting goals, and reaching out to agencies. In order to ensure the continued ability of the Commission to manage this oversight role, it must receive on-going funding, to include funds for an additional program analyst to help keep track and keep statistics. Separately, the DC Women's Agenda is uniquely poised to help with outreach and recruitment for both high-level positions and membership on the Commission and its subcommittees or task forces.

The Administration and City Council should take steps to ensure the hiring of women into upper-level management positions. Currently, there does not appear to be any guidelines, apart from required equal employment and affirmative action rules, that encourages the hiring of women in "high places". It is worth noting, however, that even absent such guidelines, this Mayor has shown a dedication to creating a gender balanced administration. For example, slightly more than half of employees in D.C.'s management supervisory service are women.⁷⁰ This is great news for the women and girls of the District. It shows a strong commitment to hiring women, thus increasing the likelihood that women's issues will receive the attention they deserve.

1. Establish women in leadership positions in the city administration.
2. Institute policies and procedures which require that candidates for top-level appointments demonstrate a commitment and a plan to advance women in their agencies and an understanding of the issues affecting women and girls in the District, particularly those who are low-income and traditionally disadvantaged.
3. Empower the DC Commission for Women to oversee this comprehensive strategy for women and girls.

GIRLS

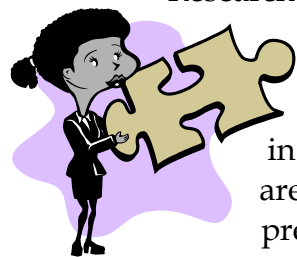
Girls need families that are economically secure, have stable housing, excellent schooling, recreational outlets, good and regular medical care, and strong family supports including quality childcare, skillful parenting and positive youth development outlets. Girls need to be involved in family life and within other activities, which support their self-esteem and their unique contributions in the world. Girls need to have experiences growing up which help them to know they have something to contribute. Girls need to be encouraged to develop relationships which are affirming and supportive.

⁷⁰ An estimated 758 of 1422 employees in the management supervisory system are women, according to a March 8, 2007 telephone conversation with D.C.'s Human Resources Public Information Office.

While girls growing up in this city need comprehensive services beginning at birth, there are some areas that are critical and require specific attention in order to keep them physically and psychologically safe and enable them to become successful women and mothers. Single gender programming is critical to addressing these areas. With an active, intentional and purposeful focus on girls, beginning at birth and through young adulthood, we will have a positive and lasting effect on women and thereby on our community at large.

1. Establish facilities where girls and young women can go to find refuge and needed services

Safe Spaces



Women and girls are at high risk in DC. The findings of The National Council for Research on Women show this. Girls are smoking more, suffer depression twice as frequently as boys, and represent a disproportionate percent of victims of rape and other forms of violence. Three out of every four child victims and survivors of violence are girls. One in every three to four girls are sexually victimized by the time they are 18 or seniors in high school. In addition, the leading causes of premature death among women – including cancer, heart disease and AIDS--are all associated with behaviors that often begin during adolescence. Girls and women account for nine out of ten cases of eating disorders, which have the highest mortality rate of all psychiatric disorders. Here in DC, one in ten teen girls become pregnant - more than 1 1/2 times the national average. More than one third of all teen births occur in Ward 7 and 8, and teen pregnancy is increasing in Ward 1.

We call on the city to provide safe spaces for girls and young women; places where they can feel secure and build their self-esteem, through community-based programs, after-school centers and summer youth programs; **places** where they can participate in mentoring and other programs and benefit from role models and the active leadership of women in the community. We recommend:

1. Providing Safe Spaces that are multi-use sites where girls can have access to services and programs specific to their needs and which address the inequities and disparities girls face in education, career development, health, athletics, financial literacy and economics, technology, leadership and being safe in the world.
2. In each Ward, establish partnerships with existing community organizations--e.g. universities, schools, recreation centers--where girl-serving programs can establish a Safe Space that offer such programs as:
 - a. Structured after school and weekend programming,
 - b. Gap programming for school holidays and summers,
 - c. Triage with mental and physical health care providers,
 - d. Internships, tutoring (including SAT support), career preparation,
 - e. Parenting classes and support,

- f. Special events and projects to enhance girls' leadership exposure and opportunities to engage with women mentors, and
 - g. Referral Hotline to special needs programs.
3. Develop a Girl Council for each Ward where girls can speak for the needs in their community, meet periodically with women leaders in their community and meet with other Ward Girl Councils to speak for and develop initiatives for girl needs city-wide.

Services for Girls and Young Women Struggling with Homelessness

Runaway and homeless youth are a difficult population to track, and the statistics for the number in Washington, DC are neither accurate nor sufficiently detailed. By most estimates there are around 1360 homeless and runaway youth in DC.⁷¹ When they become homeless, these youth have faced or will face various situations of violence, including the threat of neighborhood or gang-related violence, domestic physical and sexual abuse, dating violence, and prostitution. Of the homeless youth population, over a quarter have had parents or caretakers request sexual activity, and 32% have been forced to participate in sexual activity against their will.⁷² The US Department of Health demonstrated that 46% of runaway youth had been physically abused and 38% were emotionally abused.⁷³ One in three young women experience dating violence during their teen years.⁷⁴ Young women ages 16 to 24 experience the highest rates of violence by current or former intimate partners⁷⁵ and many adult victims of domestic violence indicate that their first violent experience occurred when they were teenagers.⁷⁶

Locally, the number of youth threatened by violent situations is more difficult to estimate. The staff at Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Inc. estimates that 20% of the 150 young women they serve in the shelter each year are survivors of dating violence. Covenant House Washington reports that in FY2006, 40 youth came from situations of domestic violence (which does not reflect those youth that chose not to divulge that information or were unaware that their experiences were considered domestic violence). Of the several residential programs for youth and young adults in the DC area, only one offers a secretive location. The Polaris program has services for prostituting young women but only four beds, so they are frequently required to move young women to other cities in order to house them in a secure environment. Homeless young women are very likely to suffer from bad health,⁷⁷ substance abuse,⁷⁸ criminal activity,⁷⁹ mental disorders,⁸⁰

⁷¹ The 2005 census counted 550,521 people living in DC, 19.8% of which are under age 18 (10,900). According to C. Raleigh-DuRoff, 1 in 8 youth under the age of 18 will become homeless. *Factors that Influence Adolescents to Leave or Stay Living on the Street*, Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal 21(6) (2004): 561-572.

⁷² L.B. Whitbeck, D.R. Hoyt, K.D. Johnson, T.A. Berdahl, S.W. Whiteford, *Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents*, University of Nebraska (2003): 3.

⁷³ Westat, Inc, *National Evaluation of Homeless Youth*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families (1997).

⁷⁴ Carolyn Tucker Halpern, et. al., *Partner Violence Among Adolescents in Opposite-Sex Romantic Relationships: Findings From the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health*, American Journal of Public Health 91 (2001): 1680.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence*, May 2000.

⁷⁶ O'Keefe, Brockopp, and Chew, "Teen Dating Violence", *Social Work*, 1986.

⁷⁷ Ellen L. Bassuk, M.C. and Steven M. Friedman, *Facts on Trauma and Homeless Children*. Durham, NC and Los Angeles, CA: National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2005) 2.

⁷⁸ N. Slesnick, R. Meyers, M. Meade and D. Segelken, *Bleak and Hopeless No More: Engagement of Reluctant Substance-Abusing Runaway Youth and Their Families*, Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment 19 (2000): 215-222.

prostitution, and low levels of education⁸¹. These consequences make it difficult for them to contribute in a meaningful way to society and increase the likelihood of their future reliance on government-funded social services.

1. Better data is needed on the homeless youth population, runaways, those who have aged out of foster care, street-dependent individuals, and teen mothers.
2. All young women under threat of violence in DC need a secretive, stable location where they can focus their energies on education, job readiness, and counseling. This should include youth experiencing domestic violence and for youth involved in commercial sex work.
3. There is also a need for additional youth shelter beds to ensure that any youth who needs a respite from home has an alternative to the streets. Safe, stable, service enriched environments – with counseling, education opportunities, treatment, and case management – mitigate the complications of street life and homelessness, and help young women develop skills to become healthy, self-sufficient adults.



2. Develop services and programs for girls and young women who are at-risk

Home Based Services for the Most At-Risk Families with Children

Of the approximately 8,000 births per year in DC, 20% or 1600 are considered “most” at-risk for child abuse, neglect and poor health based on the risk factors of late prenatal care, low birth weight, teen pregnancy and births to single mothers. Research shows that the provision of consistent, on-going, high quality home visitation services beginning during the pre-natal period and lasting at least until the child’s third birthday has large beneficial effects. However, current home based services for at-risk DC families with newborns are not able to meet the full need. In fact, the federally-funded Healthy Start program serves only 385 families. A locally-funded Home Based Services program, based on the National model, serves another 300 families. This means that more than 900 at-risk families, over half of the total, receive no services. There is an effective program in the District that, with additional funding, could address the needs of those underserved families. Healthy Families DC has supported families over the last 10 years with strong results: 95% of children complete immunizations, 100% of children enroll in health insurance, 98% of the mothers do not have a second child in 2 years, 99% of the children do not become victims of child abuse and neglect, and 96% of the babies are both at a healthy birth weight.

1. Fund services for the 900 at-risk families not covered by the Healthy Start or Home Based Services programs.

⁷⁹ Forty percent of youth surveyed in a 2005 Chicago, IL study had been arrested. See, R. Levin, E. Bax, L. McLean, and A. Sedlak, *Wherever I Can Lay My Head: Homeless Youth on Homelessness*. Chicago, IL: Center for Impact Research.

⁸⁰ L.C. Berti et al., *Comparison of Health Status of Children Using a School-Based Health Center for Comprehensive Care*, *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 15:244-250 (2001).

⁸¹ In DC, forty percent of unaccompanied youth drop out of high school or attend irregularly (NEO-RYHMIS, US Dept. of Health and Human Services https://extranet.acf.hhs.gov/rhymis/custom_reports.html).

Teenage Pregnancy Prevention

Children struggle to reach their full potential when they are born to young parents who are ill-equipped to handle the rigors of parenting. *The 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey* reports that only 76.2% of the teens that had sexual intercourse used a condom. There have been tremendous efforts at encouraging young women and men to delay parenting until they are economically and psychologically ready, and these efforts have been paying off. Research from the National Research Council indicates that teen pregnancy is less likely when boys and girls, regardless of income or race: connect to their families, schools and neighborhoods in positive ways, have safe places to spend time with adult supervision and interesting things to do; get comprehensive teen-friendly health care; make a clear plan for themselves that does not include pregnancy during their teen years; experience success in school from an early age; and have a sense of belonging. Overall, DC has experienced a continuing drop in teen pregnancy rates since 1997 when various public and private efforts were organized, although rates in Wards 1 and 4 are up--signaling the urgent need to keep programs accessible.

1. There must be continued support for the teen pregnancy prevention programs already occurring and to expand access to these programs.

3. Establish comprehensive education and career development plans for girls and young women

Head Start and After School Programming

There are both positive and negative sides of the education situation for girls in DC. Girls are often left out of the highest expectations and opportunities for leadership in math, science, technology, academic and artistic achievement.⁸² It has been well established that when young people are engaged in positive activities, they build their resilience to difficulties and decrease the chances of negative experiences occurring. There are many outstanding service providers in DC engaged in effective, important work on behalf of girls. By supporting them with sufficient resources to provide skill-building and esteem-building programs that align with and supplement Superintendent Janey's Master Education Plan during out of school time, both the public school system and the girls will benefit. Programs should begin in preschool and continue to young adulthood, then seamlessly integrate with programs for women so that there is no gap between graduation from high school and college or career. To prepare girls for a bright future, there must be more programs that emphasize:

1. Encouragement and practice in the study of math, science and technology.
2. Economic and financial literacy skills
3. Opportunities to expand ESL literacy
4. Development of skills in athletics, music and the arts
5. Sound information about health issues, including information to prevent obesity, teen pregnancy and STD's.
6. Opportunities to build self-esteem and apply social skills



⁸² The National Council for Research on Women.

7. Opportunities to develop advocacy and leadership skills

Positive Youth Development and Social Activities

Programs that support a positive self-image are essential for girls to achieve an improved quality of life. In 2006, Girls Incorporated conducted a national study of school-age children, *The Supergirl Dilemma*, and found that the higher a girl's quality of life, the less

likely she is to worry about daily issues and the more able she is to handle the stress of concerns like body image, sex, and relationships. Quality of life affects aspirations and expectations for the future, including plans for college and career success. The city should:

1. Identify and support places where girls can gather and socialize with other girls and with boys in ways that are fun, interesting and developmentally appropriate. Youth Centers can in fact be the Safe Spaces needed where girls and all young people can have access to supportive programming, adults who are good role models, and services that meet specific needs in many of the areas previously identified.

Career Development and Educational Supports

The achievement and test performance of students in DC public schools are some of the worst in the nation. The deficiencies in the education system are compounded by a lack of several things: positive role models, various employment opportunities, and encouragement for achievement. To rectify this problem, we recommend the DC government:

1. Develop programs whereby in-school and out of school programs are integrated.
2. Encourage universities, corporations, foundations, faith-based institutions and government collaborations to provide meaningful opportunities for school credits through career and college internships.
3. Expose girls to interactive sessions with women in business and other interesting fields. After school programs should include a mentoring and field work component that offers school credit and/or on the job training with the opportunity for hire.
4. Provide leadership opportunities through a Girls Council and other activities that enable girls to advocate for their own needs; identify and work on community projects, and participate in activities that result in meaningful change.

Girls, like boys, often need and clearly benefit from gender sensitive programs that begin at birth and follow them seamlessly through to adulthood. With a commitment of resources and support from the city, existing service providers can deliver the programs, partnerships, and expertise to make our city a place where girls thrive.

CONCLUSION

The District of Columbia is a very special place. It is the capital of the richest nation on earth. More than any other jurisdiction, the District should, conceivably, be a place of opportunity, and great programs, and a place where all women and girls feel they can grow and be proud of what they do and who they are.

This paper is intended to be a source of education for officials who may be unaware of what conditions are like for women and girls in the District. It is a way for officials to know what is needed in the District and what vehicle will take us to a better place. The recommendations in this paper are not far out of the 'Districts reach. They have been thoughtfully considered by the people who serve women and girls in the District and who know their needs the best. They are concrete items that can be changed and improved upon to make the lives for thousands of women and girls better. We ask that the recommendations in this paper be taken seriously and that they be acted on in order to give women and girls what they deserve: a restoration of hope for their future and their daughters, futures.



ⁱ Id.

ⁱⁱ Id.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.dccouncil.washington.dc.us/images/00001/20070207171520.pdf> (accessed on March 5, 2007)

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