



**Committee on Human Services Public Hearing, April 24, 2017.**

**Bill 22-52: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Assistance Level Increase Amendment Act of 2017 and Bill 22-0227: TANF Child Benefit Protection Amendment Act of 2017**

My name is Rev. James E. Terrell. I am pastor at Second Baptist Church in Ward 6 and President of the Council of Churches of Greater Washington. I am here today to speak on behalf of Good Faith Communities Coalition on two bills before the Committee on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

We applaud the Council for new legislation that moves the city in the right direction as it strives to create a strong safety net for families who continue to live in deep poverty. Each Bill recognizes the need to increase the monthly stipend. Bill 22-52 supports an increase of 26.7% in FY2018. While also increasing stipends, Bill 22-0227 restructures TANF as a more robust safety net.

Good Faith supports a larger monthly stipend, but also feels that after two years of uncertainty and thoughtful study, it is time to restructure the program to more closely match the program goals of assisting families to care for their children in their home, and helping them improve their ability to achieve sustaining income in an uncertain job market.

Eliminating the rigid 60-month time limit as proposed in Bill 22-0227 is a critical and necessary change. Participants working to comply with TANF requirements and achieve the program goals don't travel on a straight and unbroken path. A job is lost, a child or parent is ill, doubled up housing no longer works, domestic violence shatters a family. A safety net must be there so that a family does not fall deeper into poverty and into homelessness when crisis happens.

Bill 22-0227 recognizes the toxic effects that economic instability and extreme poverty have on children and their development. The split of the stipend, with 80% specifically dedicated to the children's needs, sustained even if the parents are not in compliance with program requirements, is the right thing to do. We must be resolute and determined to protect children so that they can develop the skills they will need in a future that is beyond poverty.

Once thought to be a one-size-fits-all program, TANF has proven to be anything but. Addressing individual capabilities, circumstances and needs, as well as the realities of the job market, is a long and often uneven process. The fact that only 40% of TANF recipients in FY2016 participated in the education and work requirements of the program makes it clear that barriers exist. If there is to be hope for economic independence, these barriers must be addressed aggressively while retaining realistic compliance requirements.

The restructuring of TANF is long overdue. It is the moral and right course of action. We must address the trauma that extreme poverty inflicts on vulnerable families and their children. We must create a safety net that helps families, protects children and gives hope. Bill 22-0227 is the right direction at this time. Good Faith wholeheartedly supports it.

As faith communities, we honor and embrace all people in our community as children of God. We are hopeful people and we continue to pray:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. Micah 6:8

Thank you. We look forward to your continued leadership