



April 4, 2024 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Commission Statement on Mayor Bowser’s Proposed FY25 Budget

Today, Mayor Bowser proposed a \$21.211M cut to the Access to Justice Initiative. The proposed budget of \$10.457M is a 67% cut from the funding level the program received in both FY23 and FY24, and takes the program back to its FY19 funding level that was set well before the pandemic.

This will have catastrophic consequences for the almost 40,000 District residents who receive life-changing civil legal services from District non-profits through the program each year, and the over 200 District agencies and community organizations like health clinics, schools, libraries, and social services agencies that rely on partnerships with Initiative-funded legal services organizations to help the people they serve.

This proposed budget undermines critical community priorities like housing stability, public safety, and economic progress.

- **Housing instability among District residents will certainly grow.** Over 50% of Initiative funding supports eviction-prevention efforts that have been proven to be effective at a time when calls for help among tenants are at crisis level. Over 76% of tenants served through the program remain housed. ***Those services cannot continue with this type of budget cut.***
- **District residents and communities will be less safe and less stable.** Reduced funding jeopardizes programs that promote public safety and community resilience, like helping victims of domestic- and gender-based violence, keeping students in school, and combatting recidivism by supporting returning citizens. ***The dire consequences of District families not having access to critical legal help will ripple through our neighborhoods.***
- **The District’s economic stability will worsen for individuals and across the community.** Services that combat individual’s economic risk and inopportunity, address employment-related problems, and help District residents access vital benefit programs may be lost. Failing to invest in this important work will worsen the circumstances of those already in crisis and further burden government systems. ***This short-sighted cut will only increase short-and long-term costs to our city.***
- **This cut will increase the vulnerability of thousands of District residents,** like children, elders, individuals with disabilities, the immigrant community, residents East of the Anacostia River, those at economic risk, our Black and brown neighbors, and other populations who will lose access to programs targeted at serving their unique needs. ***This cut targets the most vulnerable among our District neighbors.***

The D.C. Access to Justice Commission was created to help identify solutions to improve the ability of low- and moderate-income residents to access the civil justice system. One of our first priorities was to secure public funding to establish consistent support for non-profit organizations that offer free, legal help to low-income District residents in need. The Access to Justice Initiative was created 18 years ago through that effort. The program is administered by the D.C. Bar Foundation, that in turn issues grants to over 30 community-based organizations each year that deliver direct services to District residents. You can learn more [HERE](#).

We now turn to the D.C. Council for its support in restoring necessary funding to this vital program. The D.C. Council created and has long recognized the value and impact of civil legal services on the safety, economic stability, and community health of the District community.

High quality, effective programs that work like the Access to Justice Initiative should not be at risk every budget year. Last year the Initiative faced a comparable 60% cut. This destabilizing trend will cause the District to backslide in our efforts to ensure its residents have the access to civil justice that they deserve in our Nation's capital.

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