



D.C. Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger in the nation's capital

2024 Racial Equity Report: How Racial Inequities Impact Food Security in the District of Columbia

March 2024 ■ www.dchunger.org



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Acknowledgments

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About D.C. Hunger Solutions

D.C. Hunger Solutions, founded in 2002 as an initiative of the Food Research & Action Center, seeks to create a hunger-free community and improve the nutrition, health, economic security, and well-being of residents with low income in the District of Columbia. To learn more about D.C. Hunger Solutions, visit www.dchunger.org.

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Executive Summary

Across the nation, racial inequities have impacted access to federal nutrition programs for people of color. Historical and present injustices, including racism, have influenced rules concerning eligibility and need, and have limited Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people's access to these programs. These injustices reflect a larger history of colonization and oppression that has impacted people of color.

The goal of this report is to address how racial inequities contribute to hunger and poverty among District of Columbia residents of color and lack of access to federal nutrition programs across the District. With some communities, particularly communities of color in the District, facing a stark dearth of food and other vital resources compared to others, the state of hunger and nutrition access in the nation's capital demonstrates inequities resulting from longstanding, wide-ranging systemic discriminatory national and local laws, policies, and practices.

Food insecurity is driven by poverty. According to the D.C. Food Policy Council report, *The Road Ahead: 2021 Update on Food Access & Food Security in the District of Columbia*, nearly 11 percent of households in D.C. struggle to afford enough food. Wards 7 and 8, east of the Anacostia River, populated by mostly Black people, experience extreme wealth, health, and educational disparities.

The overall landscape of hunger in the U.S. is underscored by a racial wealth divide. The differences in income highlight the racial wealth gap.¹ In 2022, the median household income in America was \$74,580 (a 2.3 percent decrease from 2021), but across racial groups, Black households had the lowest median income at \$52,860.² This income disparity is seen in the District of Columbia as well. The median household income across the District is \$104,110, yet for Black residents, the median household income is \$75,473.³ Even further, for Black residents living in Wards 7 and 8, the median household income is less than \$50,000.⁴ These statistics are driven by historical disinvestment and lack of infrastructure for communities east of the Anacostia River.



Key Findings

- **On both a national and state level, racial injustices have been detrimental to the socioeconomic conditions for Black and other people of color.** In D.C., housing, economic well-being, food access, and more are social determinants of health that have been compromised for these communities due to historical disinvestment. This also is linked to the gaps in income and education for people of color, when compared to their White counterparts.
- **For residents in the District, especially those living in the primarily Black communities, Ward 7 and Ward 8, it is especially important that federal nutrition programs and initiatives are accessible for older adults, immigrant families, and students from households with low incomes (Ward 8 has the largest share of families with children, and the lowest median age).** The lack of grocery stores and Metro stops east of the Anacostia River has created an inaccessible environment, affecting residents' ability to reside in a well-supported, thriving community. Wards 7 and 8 continue to experience the highest levels of socioeconomic disparities, encompassing communities primarily east of the river, while also experiencing the rise in the cost of living in the District.

■ **Older adults, immigrant families, and students from households with low incomes are vulnerable populations that should be prioritized in initiatives aimed at achieving racial equity.** Older residents experience additional hurdles, including accessing technology used for federal nutrition programs and transportation to grocery stores, as they age. Immigrant families may encounter language barriers in both accessing federal nutrition programs and grocery stores. Initiatives should be put in place to ensure that food systems are accessible for all. For many students from households with low incomes, schools provide consistent meals needed for healthy development. Funding for school meals should be prioritized to ensure that students continue to have this access to nutrition.



About This Report

In this report, D.C. Hunger Solutions (DCHS) investigates and highlights the discrimination and historical disinvestment that has driven the racial inequities within the hunger landscape in the District. This report includes historical context, data, and recommendations to address poverty and hunger across the District.

The District of Columbia is divided into eight Wards, all of which vary in demographics. The majority of residents (106,206) live in Ward 6, followed by Ward 5 (88,965), Ward 1 (83,885), Ward 2 (83,162), Ward 4 (83,103), Ward 3 (77,813), Ward 7 (74,561), and Ward 8 (73,200). DCHS utilizes the term “east of the Anacostia River,” in addition to Wards 7 and 8, to describe communities in these Wards that continue

to experience disinvestment. Racial inequities and historical disinvestment exist in other areas of the District but are experienced disproportionately in these communities.

A national perspective on hunger and poverty across the country is needed to understand hunger and poverty within the District of Columbia. This report includes U.S. Census-level data and other data sources from 2022 through 2023. Utilizing demographic population data from across the nation and the District, DCHS assessed the current socioeconomic disparities within various communities within the District based on race and income.

Race, Ethnicity, Income, and Poverty Illustrate Hunger in the U.S. and the District

Historical Racial Inequities

Racial inequities have made it difficult for people of color to achieve equal outcomes compared to White people living in the U.S. Examples of racial discriminatory practices include segregation, housing discrimination (“redlining”), gentrification, employment discrimination, and criminalization.⁵ These practices affected the neighborhoods where people of color could reside, education, job attainment, and more.

Segregation laws legally divided schools, neighborhoods, and infrastructure into “equal but separate” sectors for White people and people of color.⁶ This in turn created food apartheid for people of color. The term “food apartheid,” as coined by Karen Washington, an urban farmer, food justice advocate, and community activist, emphasizes the root causes of inequity in our food system based on race, class, and geography due to discriminatory planning and policy decisions.⁷

Incarceration also has had a negative impact on individuals and their families. While the impact of food insecurity on returning citizens is understudied, previous studies have identified hunger as an issue for those who are formerly incarcerated.⁸ In the 1990s, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act banned Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits for people with felony drug convictions,

and with a history of “fleeing” their probation or parole, and people who have committed welfare fraud.⁹ Some states continue to require drug tests to be eligible for SNAP benefits, or may require a wait period for returning citizens before they are eligible.¹⁰

How Is Race Defined?

Race is a social construct without a biological basis that has been used to classify people by their physical attributes and culture.¹¹ Anthropologists view race in the context of the U.S. as a “social mechanism” beginning in colonial America used to classify the differences between the Europeans, Native Americans, and peoples brought from Africa.¹² This mechanism was used to justify European efforts to colonize and enslave in America, by attributing “negative and inferior” traits to Indigenous people and Black people. The U.S. Census Bureau’s definition of race is determined by guidelines by the Office of Management and Budget Standards, which requires a minimum of five categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or White.¹³ Ethnicity, which describes a person’s religion, culture, language, and national heritage, should not be confused with race.¹⁴

Racial Equity

Although “equality” and “equity” may seem like the same concept, they differ in application. Equity applies targeted strategies for equal outcomes for all groups, whereas equality applies equal strategies to all groups regardless of if the outcomes are truly equal.¹⁵ Racial equity is created through intentional investments in communities of color that acknowledge the structural oppression that they face, resulting in equal outcomes for all communities.¹⁶

Due to the structural oppression that people of color have experienced historically, equal strategies

across racial groups cannot break down barriers nor bridge gaps that exist as a result. Racial inequities in opportunity, wealth, and hunger exist because of discriminatory practices and policies that undervalue communities of color. Examples that have led to racial inequities include:¹⁷

- redlining and housing discrimination
- segregation
- opportunity hoarding
- gentrification
- employment discrimination

Race and Ethnicity

Because of systemic inequities, structural racism, and discrimination, hunger and poverty have been exacerbated for communities of color. Compared to national population totals, the District consists of higher concentrations of people of color, making the achievement of racial equity especially important. Black and White residents are the most populous demographic in D.C. However, there are disparities in food access and other vital resources in District neighborhoods that are predominantly non-White.

Forty percent of residents identify as White, with the highest concentration of White-identified residents living in Ward 3 (69.6 percent), Ward 2 (61.2 percent), and Ward 6 (53.7 percent).¹⁸ Black residents make up 39 percent of the population, residing mostly in Ward 7 (86.6 percent), followed by Ward 8 (86.5 percent), and Ward 5 (45.8 percent).¹⁹ Nearly 90 percent of Ward 7 and Ward 8 residents identify as Black.²⁰

The percent of the population that identifies as Hispanic/Latinx is 11.8 percent, with the majority of Latinx-identified residents residing in Ward 4 (23.19 percent), followed by Ward 1 (18.91 percent), and Ward 2 (18.91 percent).²¹ Ward 8 had the least amount of Latinx-identified residents (3.66 percent), but also has the lowest population of all Wards.²² The number of residents identifying as Asian is 34,245, represented in Ward 2, Ward 3, and Ward 1.²³



In D.C., 64,158 (9.45 percent) residents identify with two or more races, with many residing in Ward 3, Ward 1, and Ward 4.²⁴ Over 3,000 residents identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native, living primarily in Ward 4, Ward 1, and Ward 5.²⁵ Less than 1 percent of D.C.'s population identifies as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and mainly reside in Ward 1, Ward 2, and Ward 3.²⁶ Around 64,000 residents in the District identify as another race not specified and reside primarily in Ward 4, Ward 1, and Ward 5.²⁷

Income and Poverty

In 2022, the U.S. Census Bureau Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) found that 12.4 percent of people in the U.S. were living in poverty.²⁸ Across racial groups, Indigenous people (American Indian and Alaska Native) had the highest rate of poverty at 23.2 percent, followed by Black people at 17.2 percent, and those who identify as two or more races at 11.4 percent.²⁹ Those who identified as Hispanic had a SPM rate of 19.3 percent.³⁰

The racial wealth gap continues to persist, highlighting the disparity in wealth and assets across races. Housing and living costs have increased at a much higher rate than income, affecting the wealth-building capabilities of many households. Across all households in the country, Whites make up 80.7 percent of the distribution of household wealth, totaling \$133.03 trillion dollars; Blacks make up 4.9 percent of this distribution, totaling \$8.15 trillion dollars.³¹

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's report on income in the U.S., the 2022 median household income was \$74,580. However, this amount differs across racial groups. The median income for a Black household is \$52,860, yet the median income for White households is \$81,060.³² Asian households have the highest median household income at \$108,700, and Hispanic households' median income is \$62,800.³³

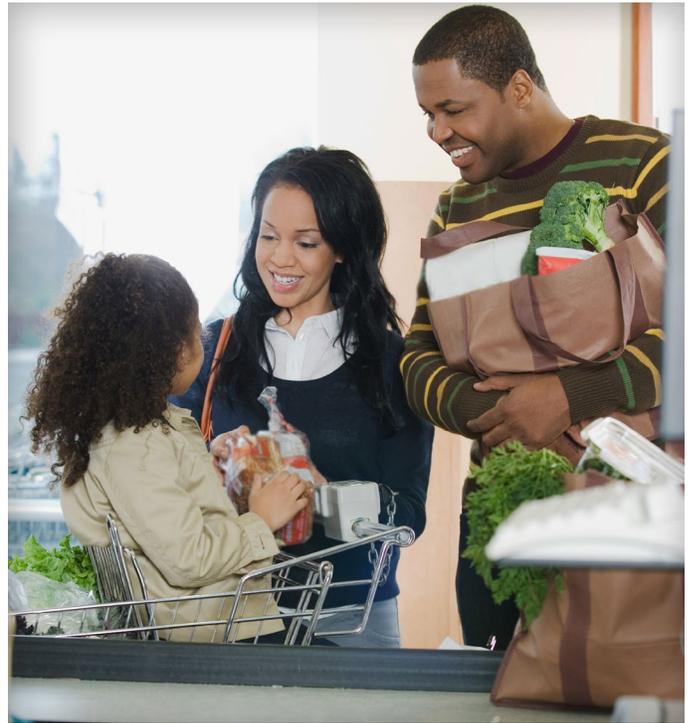
The median household income for the District is \$104,110, which is 40 percent higher than the national median household income in 2022 (\$74,580).^{34,35} Across racial groups, median household income levels vary. While the 2022 national median income for Black households is around \$52,000, the median household income for Black households in the District is \$54,401.³⁶ However,

the median household income for Black residents in the District falls below \$50,000 in Ward 1 (\$49,148), Ward 7 (\$45,674), and Ward 8 (\$45,281).³⁷ The largest share of households in the District fall in the \$50,000–\$74,999 income bracket (11.22 percent), followed by under \$15,000 income bracket (10.84 percent), and the \$150,000–\$199,999 income bracket (10.51 percent).³⁸ The number of families in the District living below the poverty line is 13,006, and more than 9,000 of those families include children.³⁹

Ward 3 has the highest median household income (\$144,650) for Asian residents, yet Asian households living in Wards 7 and 8 make half or less than this amount.⁴⁰ Wealth disparities also persist between White residents and residents of color. While White residents have a median household income of \$161,812, Black residents' median household income amounts to \$54,401 for the entire District.⁴¹ Communities in Wards 7 and 8 experience a much higher percentage of people living below the federal poverty line (20.5 percent) and a median household income of less than \$50,000.^{42,43} Wards 7 and 8, which are both predominantly Black (86.63 percent and 86.51 percent, respectively) experience the most extreme levels of poverty.^{44,45} Communities in both Wards, east of the Anacostia River, have residents living below the poverty line at twice the rate for the entire District and encounter other structural barriers to good nutrition and health.

Income, employment, and education disparities illustrate a larger issue occurring across D.C. for residents of color. The fact that the largest concentration of residents of color live in the Wards with the lowest median household income, educational attainment, and highest unemployment rate points to systemic and structural oppression within the District.

Several risk and protective factors can affect a household's total income, including age, region, educational attainment, and living in urban, suburban, or rural areas. It becomes clear that Black residents and more people of color are impacted by their locality in the city. This is primarily due to an uneven distribution of resources and infrastructure in the District, in addition to historical racial injustices.



The gender pay gap in the District is estimated at nearly \$16,000 across median earnings, despite women accounting for over half of the population. With a bachelor's degree, the pay gap decreases to \$9,895, yet remains significant.

Food Insecurity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that the average rate of food insecurity in 2020–2022 was 11.2 percent for the U.S. States that experienced the highest levels of food insecurity include Arkansas (17 percent), Texas (16 percent), and Mississippi (15 percent).⁴⁶ Comparatively, the USDA reports a 10 percent food insecurity rate for the District of Columbia.

In 2022, 12.8 percent of households in the U.S. were food insecure, totaling to around 17 million households. Black (22.4 percent) and Hispanic (20.8 percent) persons all experienced rates of food insecurity at higher rates than the national average (12.8 percent).⁴⁷

Over a third of all households experiencing food insecurity in the U.S. were households with children, and 17.9 percent of households with children were headed by a single woman.⁴⁸ While 21.2 percent of households

headed by single fathers were food insecure, 33.1 percent of households headed by single mothers were food insecure.⁴⁹ Even in households with women living alone (15.1 percent), rates of food insecurity were higher than the national average rate of food insecurity (12.8 percent).⁵⁰ This data illustrates both an economic and social disparity that impacts women at higher rates than men. Both with and without additional family members, women experience higher rates of hunger, which could be driven by the gender wealth gap.

In U.S. households with children, 17.3 percent (6.4 million households) were food insecure at some point in 2022.⁵¹ Nationally, children and older adults experience elevated rates of poverty and are often dependent on other household members' income. Age groups ≤ 18 years of age and ≥ 65 years of age experienced the highest rates of poverty at 12.4 percent and 14.1 percent, respectively, in 2022.⁵²

In the U.S., households with young children (younger than 6 years of age) were more likely to experience food insecurity at 16.7 percent. Half of these households included food insecure adults, while their children's diet remained normal.⁵³ Across the nation, households with adults over 65 years old represented 22.9 percent of all households experiencing food insecurity.⁵⁴

D.C. is concentrated with young and middle-aged adults, with the most populous age group being 25–34-year-

olds, followed by 35–44-year-olds.⁵⁵ The least populous age groups include seniors 85 years old and older, and teenagers ages 15 to 17 years old.⁵⁶ Nineteen percent of D.C. residents are under 18 years of age, with 40,286 residents ages 0–4.⁵⁷ Ward 4 has a median age of 38.6, followed by Ward 5 at 37.75 years, and Ward 3 at 36.8 years.⁵⁸ Ward 8 has the lowest median age at 32.27 years, yet it is the area with the highest number of households with children.⁵⁹

Across all Wards, single-person and two-person households are the two highest household sizes.⁶⁰ Of all households in Ward 8, nearly 38 percent are households with children.⁶¹ Similarly, 34 percent of households in Ward 7 include children.⁶² As the two Wards with the highest rates of individuals living below the federal poverty line and the lowest median household income, family and education-based solutions and programs should be considered for improving the outcomes of young people living in D.C.

Older adults who reside in the District continue to experience a high rate of food insecurity, with 13.8 percent living below the poverty line in 2022.⁶³ Furthermore, households with older adults represented over 33 percent of all SNAP recipients in the District.⁶⁴ The largest number of older adults 65 years of age and older live in Ward 4 (17.1 percent), followed by Ward 3 (16.5 percent), and Ward 5 (15.9 percent).⁶⁵

Measuring Participation in Federal Nutrition Programs

SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest federal nutrition program, with 41,206,900 people across the country participating in the program in fiscal year 2022, around 12 percent of the U.S. population.⁶⁶ Over 65 percent of people who received SNAP in fiscal year 2022 had children in their household, illustrating the program's importance for children and their families.⁶⁷ SNAP is estimated to generate \$1.50 in economic activity for every dollar in SNAP benefits.⁶⁸ SNAP had 41.1 million participants in August 2022, and had 41.7 million participants in August of 2023, a total participant

increase of 1.54 percent.⁶⁹ From August 2022 to August 2023, the average SNAP benefit shifted from \$221 to \$180.⁷⁰ While SNAP increased its participants, the average SNAP benefit decreased by nearly 20 percent.⁷¹ Many saw decreases to their benefits with pandemic-era Emergency Allotments ending shortly before the end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) in May 2023.⁷²

In the District, SNAP participation decreased slightly from August 2022 to August 2023, with participation dropping from 142,764 participants to 139,485 participants over

the course of a year.⁷³ The decrease in the number of households participating was more significant, with a 5.2 percent (4,561 households) change.⁷⁴ Across Wards in 2022, Ward 8 had the largest share of families receiving SNAP (25,792), followed by Ward 7 (21,003) and Ward 5 (12,802).⁷⁵ Ward 3 had the lowest number of families on SNAP, falling just under 2,000.⁷⁶

Despite striving to provide assistance to all families with low incomes, program requirements for SNAP create barriers to accessing the program. For example, work requirements and immigration status are both conditions for receiving SNAP.^{77,78} Work requirements were suspended during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) but resumed after the PHE ended in May 2023. Those who do not meet work requirements may only receive three months of benefits every three years unless they are exempt. Work requirements for SNAP and other federal nutrition programs do not improve employment, but rather prevent those who need SNAP the most from receiving benefits from the program.⁷⁹

While work requirements and other requirements vary state to state, their presence prevents vulnerable populations from receiving benefits. This speaks to a larger conversation around who “needs” and does not need benefits, and the origin of these policies stemming from prejudices based on race, class, gender, and disability status.⁸⁰ In D.C., work requirements have been waived because of the rate of unemployment in the District. Able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) are waived from SNAP work requirements in the District because of the unemployment rate being higher than the national average; this waiver expires November 2024.⁸¹

SNAP requirements also have an impact on program access for college students. In 2020, 20 percent of students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities reported using SNAP, indicating a high number of food insecure students over the course of the pandemic.⁸² Temporary exemptions were made during the pandemic, allowing students who are eligible for work-study or who had an expected family contribution of \$0 to participate in the program. However, following July 1, 2023, these



temporary student exemptions ended, making many students ineligible for the program.

WIC

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) serves pregnant people, new parents, and their children up to age 5. In addition to providing benefits to purchase specific grocery store items, the program also offers nutrition education, resources, support, and referrals. In August 2022, WIC saw 6.38 million participants with an average benefit of \$55. By August 2023, WIC had 6.7 million participants and an average benefit of \$58.⁸³ Unlike SNAP, WIC saw increases in both participation (+4.93 percent) and benefits (+5.79 percent) from August 2022 to August 2023.

In 2021, 1.85 million infants nationwide were eligible for WIC, but only 78 percent were enrolled. This trend in lack of participation continues as WIC-eligible children get older. In the same year, 64.3 percent of 1-year-olds, 44.2 percent of 2-year-olds, 41.4 percent of 3-year-olds, and 24.7 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in the program. An inverse trend is found in pregnant and postpartum women: While only 43.7 percent of pregnant women

who are eligible for WIC participate, a larger share of postpartum breastfeeding women (60.8 percent) and postpartum non-breastfeeding women (77.2 percent) participate in the program.

Across the District, prior to the pandemic in fiscal year 2020, a total of 13,401 residents participated in WIC with an increased participation in 2021 of 4.4 percent (13,990 participants). During fiscal year 2023, 11,184 residents participate in WIC, similar to fiscal year 2022 levels of 11,640 participants. This may suggest that many guardians and children in the District may be eligible for WIC, but are not enrolled.

School Meals Programs

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) serve students in schools across the country. In August 2023, NSLP saw 21 million participants and over 261 million lunches served, with 70 percent of meals being offered for free.⁸⁴ While NSLP did not see significant change from August 2022 to August 2023, SBP participants and meals served decreased from 2022 to 2023. During August 2022, 10.6 million participants were served 133 million breakfasts, with 79.5 percent of all meals served being free. In August 2023, 10.8 million participants received 132 million breakfasts, with 79.1 percent being offered for free.⁸⁵ Despite the decreases in participation and meals served, the percentage of free meals offered remained similar.

In the District, NSLP experienced a 10 percent increase in child participants, with 47,373 participating children in September 2022, and 52,109 participating children in September 2023.⁸⁶ Similarly, SBP increased child participation by 10 percent, with 36,186 children participating in September 2022 and 39,804 children participating in September 2023.⁸⁷ For every 100 students from households with low incomes participating in school lunch in 2022, 74 students from households with low incomes participated in school breakfast.⁸⁸ Of the 117 District of Columbia Public Schools, all schools offer breakfast to all students for free, and 96 schools serve free lunch through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision, which allows high-poverty schools to provide meals at no charge to all students.^{89,90}

CACFP

The Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) is a federal program that provides financial reimbursements to child care and adult day care sites when they provide nutritious foods (within designated federal guidelines) to children and adults at these sites who meet eligibility criteria. According to the USDA FNS, over 4 million children benefit from the CACFP daily. These sites are a significant modality in which children can access food and exemplify how public policy has an intervening capacity to influence childhood health and well-being.

CACFP data from the USDA FNS reports that in fiscal year 2022, there were 37,516 participants in the program, with 13,437,370 meals served. Additionally, data from Child Care Aware of America and the District of Columbia Division of Health & Wellness report that there were 488 child care programs in D.C. in 2022, with only 33 percent participating in CACFP. The Child Care Aware D.C. report also assessed poverty data across the District, and overlaid it with the number of child care providers, finding that there continues to be areas of potential CACFP eligibility, highlighting a need to increase participation in the program.

The [Healthy Tots Act](#), adopted in June 2014, provides reimbursements for child care centers and day care homes that participate in CACFP. This comprehensive early childhood legislation improves the quality of hundreds of community-based child care centers and homes, and ensures that thousands more children have access to the nutritious meals they need to grow, learn, and thrive, by offering the following provisions:

- **Add 10:** an automatic 10 cents reimbursement for all meals that meet CACFP meal requirements.
- **Local 5:** an additional 5 cents reimbursement for lunches and dinners that have at least one component of locally grown unprocessed food.
- **Full Day 4:** an additional snack or meal for facilities that maximize the number of allowable federally funded CACFP meals. The additional meal or snack is reimbursed through local funding, if it meets CACFP requirements.

Root Causes of Hunger Across the District

Hunger in D.C. does not exist in a vacuum — it is the result of policy, city planning, and historical inequities. However, policy and future planning can also be the solution to ending hunger in the District. FRAC describes systemic discrimination as a driving force behind the root causes of hunger and poverty.⁹¹ This report explores lack of transportation, affordable and safe housing, access to child care, economic stability, and language access as drivers of hunger and poverty for people of color.

Lack of Transportation

Over one third of residents in the District rely on public transportation.⁹² Ward 8, Ward 7, and Ward 4 experience the highest number of residents who drive to work. These Wards also exist along the edge of the D.C.-Maryland border. When analyzing the Metro system map, the lack of stations east of the Anacostia River becomes clear.⁹³ Of the six Metro lines that run through D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, four Metro lines run east of the Anacostia River. There are five stops east of the Anacostia River in D.C., with one shared by the silver and blue lines. There are two stops in Ward 8 and three stops in Ward 7.

In comparison, the red line does not touch east of the Anacostia River but includes 27 stops through D.C. and Maryland. The Circulator shuttle bus does not have any stops in Ward 4, Ward 5, or Ward 7, and the majority of its stops are in Ward 2.⁹⁴

In terms of the Metrobus, Ward 7 and Ward 8 make up 30 percent of all stops in D.C., with Ward 5 hosting the highest number of stops (525 total).⁹⁵ With many residents already experiencing issues accessing public transportation, a reduction in bus stops or Metro stops would have a profound impact on the hunger landscape in D.C. This could create many negative implications for both older adults and residents with disabilities. Furthermore, it would limit many residents' access to grocery stores. Ridesharing apps may be the only option, but this becomes expensive over time, and some areas may not be accessible through these apps.

For Wards 7 and 8, a lack of Metro stops east of the Anacostia River has contributed to higher commute times. The areas with the highest commute times are zip codes 20012 (Ward 4), 20020 (Ward 7 and 8), and 20032 (Ward 8), all above 40 minutes. Furthermore, the cost of using the Metro may contribute to residents being reluctant to use the service. While base fare has dropped to \$2, the maximum fare has increased to \$6.50.⁹⁶ To offset the increased fare, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority offers a Low-Income Fare Program called “Metro Lift” for SNAP recipients that will decrease fares by 50 percent.⁹⁷ One of the main targets of the Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan (released in 2019) included “improving transit connections to employment and activity centers from underserved areas.”⁹⁸ The plan highlights areas east of the Anacostia River such as MLK Gateway, Skyland, and St. Elizabeths.

Affordable, Safe Housing Availability

After the Housing Act of 1949, many White residents around the country began to move to the suburbs, beginning what is now called “White flight” during the 1950s and 1960s.⁹⁹ Once the Supreme Court found racial covenants (rules restricting Black homebuyers from living in certain areas) were “unenforceable,” blockbusting (the process of White homeowners selling their homes in fear of Black residents bringing down property values) increased White flight.¹⁰⁰ Due to this loss of investment, many urban areas would eventually be targeted for urban renewal that would uproot Black neighborhoods in pursuit of highways and infrastructure for suburban residents.

Given the racialized history of housing in D.C., securing affordable housing is a prominent obstacle for residents of color. Differences in wealth building, housing discrimination, and hiring discrimination have created disproportionate rates in homeownership for people of color, who are less likely than White people to own their own homes.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, residents of color have been displaced from their neighborhoods because of gentrification and wealth disparities.¹⁰² This displacement can look like eviction, unsafe living conditions, or being unable to keep up with rising housing costs. Fifty-eight percent of residents in the District rent their home, making issues surrounding affordable housing especially important.¹⁰³ For a person working minimum wage (\$17/hour) seeking a one-bedroom rental at fair market rent (\$1,615), they would need to work 73 hours a week to afford living there.¹⁰⁴ When ranked by the highest two-bedroom housing wage, D.C. places sixth among all states and Puerto Rico.¹⁰⁵ With the median household income for Black residents in the District falling short of \$50,000, the housing disparities become clear. Residents may prioritize paying rent over other aspects of living, including food, because having shelter feels most important.

Child Care Costs and Shortages

Of the more than 12 million children in child care, the Child Care and Development Block Grant subsidizes care for 1.3 million of them.¹⁰⁶ Even when qualified for subsidies, many children may not receive them due to child care shortages or may experience disparities in how much their child care is subsidized.¹⁰⁷ The District's Child Care Subsidy Program works for many mid- to low-income families, but disparities in child care (with some programs not accepting subsidies at all) continue to persist.¹⁰⁸ Families may apply to the program and receive a child care voucher, with over 250 participating providers.¹⁰⁹

My Child Care DC assists families with finding information on early care programs and choosing child care facilities for their children. While the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services lists 7 percent of household income as affordable child care, families in the District often spend much more than this.¹¹⁰ These costs affect many families with low incomes and can impact a family's ability to achieve upward mobility. This is especially true for young parents and pregnant teens who may rely on child care to finish their education and maintain employment.

District families pay \$417 per week (nearly \$22,000 annually) on average for child care, 85 percent higher than the national average.¹¹¹ Comparatively, in 2021 the annual



cost of center-based child care for toddlers in the District was the highest in the country at roughly \$24,000, more than five times the cost of child care in Mississippi, the state with the lowest child care costs. The largest gaps in child care in the District impact families with low incomes in Wards 7 and 8 the most.¹¹² Within the district, Black communities experience higher child care shortages than White communities.¹¹³ With child care costs accounting for a large percentage of household income, it impacts how families spend their income and may even impact their decision to invest in child care at all.

Community Disinvestment, High Cost of Living

Investing in communities in the District is important for maintaining economic stability. Unemployment, taxes, tax credits, funds, and initiatives are all important for cultivating D.C.'s economy. As demonstrated by housing costs, D.C. cost of living is much higher than other cities and states in the U.S. Many high-paying jobs require college degrees, while many residents struggle to receive quality education.

Employment and educational attainment also vary across the District in different Wards. Ward 2 and Ward 3 have the lowest levels of unemployment in residents 16 years and older and the highest concentration of degree holders age 25 years old and older.¹¹⁴ Wards 7 and 8 have unemployment rates for persons 16 years and older more than double that of the District average. Education,

transportation, health, and more all tie into a person's ability to maintain employment and afford the cost of living in the District.

Systemic racism and economic exclusion have put people of color in positions of socioeconomic struggle, and safety net programs eligibility requirements prevent the progression of dismantling this. Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a “refundable tax credit designed especially for low- and moderate-income workers” that provides compensation for workers who file taxes.¹¹⁵ EITC is denied to people without a Social Security Number (SSN). In 2021, 90 percent of undocumented people were either Latinx, Asian, or Black.¹¹⁶ This exclusion means an inability to achieve racial equity for all people of color with low incomes who have had reduced access to wealth. In D.C. beginning in tax year 2023, residents can claim D.C. EITC if they file a federal income tax return and would be eligible for a federal EITC, if an SSN is the only lacking requirement.¹¹⁷ Child Tax Credit Expansion of EITC is a powerful tool for easing the economic burden for thousands of residents and would have a profound impact on both the economy and hunger landscape in the District.

Several food access initiatives contribute to D.C.'s economy, including [DC Child Trust Fund Program](#), Food Access Fund, Nourish DC Collaborative, and the [Supermarket Tax Exemption Act of 2000](#). The Food Access Fund assists food businesses to expand into locations with low food access, with priority given to Ward 7 and Ward 8 locations.¹¹⁸ The DC Child Trust Fund Program is for families enrolled in Medicaid and gives an annual designated amount (based on a family's federal poverty level) to the fund for each eligible child. In 2023, 13 more grantees were added to Nourish DC Collaborative, an initiative created to support growing food businesses in underserved areas.¹¹⁹ The Supermarket Tax Incentives grant several tax exemptions to the development or renovation of groceries stores in areas of need for up to 10 years.

Education

Employment and educational attainment are key for closing the racial wealth gap, but inequities in education and hiring processes have prevented this progress. There is a funding gap between schools in areas with higher income compared to those in lower-income areas.¹²⁰ This affects the resources and opportunity available to students in low-income areas, which directly impacts the quality and level of education these students can achieve. Due to historical segregation, students of color are more likely to attend schools in lower-income areas than White students.¹²¹ Across educational attainment groups in 2022, those without a high school diploma had a SPM poverty rate of 27.9 percent, with those who had a high school diploma but did not go to college having a SPM poverty rate of 15.6 percent.¹²²

Dealing with food insecurity and living in poverty are significant barriers to achieving academic success, a key component in upward mobility for many families. During the 2022–2023 school year, the groups of students who dealt with the highest rates of chronic absenteeism in the District were homeless students (65.1 percent), economically disadvantaged students (59.3 percent), and students in foster care (55.6 percent).¹²³ For Black students, who are more likely to be dealing with these social conditions, this has translated into the highest rate of chronic absenteeism across racial groups.

More than half of Black students (53.3 percent) struggle with chronic absenteeism, with American Indian/Alaskan Native students (48.2 percent) at similar levels, and Hispanic/Latinx students (37.2 percent) also experiencing significant issues with attendance.¹²⁴ Asian and White students had the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism, at less than 20 percent.¹²⁵ As District students get older, they are more likely to deal with attendance issues (57 percent of high school students struggle with chronic absenteeism), and attendance issues have increased since the beginning of the pandemic.¹²⁶

Hunger affects both physical development and cognitive development and can have a profound effect on a student's mental health. The relationship between hunger and chronic absenteeism is still being explored, but



schools provide meals for students who may otherwise not have access to food. Programs like Breakfast After the Bell have been associated with a decrease in chronic absenteeism.¹²⁷

The Healthy Schools Act (HSA) of 2010 includes health and nutrition requirements for schools and educational agencies to combat the rate of obesity in young people. In 2018, it was amended by the Healthy Students Act, which included subsidies for schools that implement breakfast in the classroom and reinforced nutrition requirements and physical education instruction.¹²⁸ In order to receive HSA funds, schools must remain compliant.

Language Access

Language access is an important component for racial equity, as it ensures that all residents have access to resources in their respective language. There are a wealth of language communities within the District. In 2019, the most common household languages aside from English were Spanish (58,536 households); French (8,516 households); Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages (6,154 households); and Chinese, including Mandarin and Cantonese (5,050); and Korean (1,512 households).¹²⁹

Twenty years ago, the District passed the [D.C. Language Act of 2004](#), which required District government and

services to offer written and oral translation for residents who have limited or no-English proficiency (LEP/NEP).¹³⁰ The D.C. Office of Human Rights leads the Language Access Program, which monitors and evaluates required agencies each year.¹³¹ This includes the D.C. Department of Human Services (DHS), which oversees SNAP and TANF. During fiscal year 2021, the five most encountered languages for DHS were Spanish, Amharic, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Chinese-Mandarin.¹³² Over 15 percent of D.C. residents ages 5 and up speak a language other than English, demonstrating the need for these services.¹³³

Language access is a barrier in grocery stores as well. LEP and NEP residents sometimes have to navigate stores where they may be unable to find cultural foods and ingredients, and may be unfamiliar with some foods in stores. Food would be more accessible to these residents if recipes, food labels, and food instructions included translations. For LEP/NEP households experiencing hunger and poverty, these translations may be crucial for accessing needed nutrition.

Recommendations to Upend Racial Inequities in Federal Nutrition Programs

D.C. Hunger Solutions recommends policy-level implementations such as guaranteed universal income; increased funding for the [Child Wealth Building Act](#), created to support the future of children in District households with low incomes by providing an annual deposit amount in a trust fund account for each child; fully funding the [Senior Nutrition and Well-Being Equity Act](#), which improves services, increases referrals, and promotes information to support the needs of District seniors; and continued, non-lapsing funding for [Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act](#). Other recommendations include:

■ Expansion of Language Access Amendment

The D.C. Language Access Act requires the District government to create “equal access and participation” in public agencies and services for LEP and NEP residents.¹³⁴ This means that LEP/NEP residents are

entitled to interpreter services, document translations, and the ability to file a complaint if they are denied. An expansion would include ensuring that digital services, websites, and documents are also available to LEP/NEP residents, as well as the availability of resources for public transportation and grocery stores.

■ **Continued Funding for the Food Access Fund and Nourish DC Collaborative**

Investing in food-related businesses around the District, primarily those that are owned by local residents and people of color, is important for creating a more equitable food ecosystem and stimulate the local economy.

■ **Earned Income Tax Credits and Child Tax Credit**

The Earned Income Tax Credits is important for generating economic activity in the District. Along with the Child Trust Fund Program, Child Tax Credits (CTC) support and fund the future of children in the District. A District-level CTC reaching families up to 300 percent of the federal poverty line would impact nearly 80,000 children.¹³⁵ Providing funding in the amount of \$1,500 per child under the age of 18 could lift 4,700 children out of poverty.¹³⁵ This would have a profound impact on families' ability to afford basic necessities and child care. By providing economic incentives to families and their children, both initiatives ensure that children and their health are supported throughout their lives.

Conclusion

Achieving racial equity in the District requires targeted investments in communities to combat past racist and discriminatory practices and legislation. This includes prioritizing communities east of the Anacostia River that are directly impacted by historical disinvestment and present-day gentrification. Wealth and income, poverty, and housing disparities are extreme across the District, with Ward 7 and Ward 8 experiencing the strongest effects. Neighborhoods east of the Anacostia

River housing primarily Black residents and lacking the significant infrastructure needed to support them is not a coincidence. It is the result of racial oppression, which has caused and exacerbated poverty and hunger in these communities, and created barriers for the population's access to critical resources such as federal nutrition programs — and can only be remedied by targeted, equitable solutions like those outlined in this report.

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