



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

December 14, 2023

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

We urge you and your administration to reconsider the decision to disregard District law and deny District residents an increase to their SNAP benefits in 2024. Your decision not to spend over \$39 million for its intended purpose means that more than 140,000 residents will not receive the expected increase in SNAP benefits due to begin in January 2024.

As you know, the Fiscal Year 2024 Local Budget Act of 2023 and the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Support Act of 2023, both of which you signed, directed your administration to implement a locally funded increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP”) benefits between January 1, 2024, and September 30, 2024. The Council appropriated over \$39 million for that express purpose if the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (“OCFO”) determined that sufficient excess funds were available to fund the increase based on the September 2023 revenue estimate. On September 30, 2023, the OCFO released the [September revenue estimate](#) and certified that there was sufficient excess revenue to move forward with the SNAP increase. A [funding certification](#) from the OCFO was published in the D.C. Register on October 20, 2023. The OCFO has confirmed that the \$39.6 million has been transferred to the Department of Human Services (“DHS”) to fund the SNAP increase. The funding is available and the law requires it to be used only for that express purpose. However, the Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services (“DMHHS”) and the DHS Director recently reported they have no intention of preparing to administer the SNAP increase in January, and that they intend to redirect the funds to other Executive priorities.

Your administration has cited various budget pressures as an apparent justification for your decision not to comply with the legal obligation to fund the SNAP increase. They claim that these pressures include approximately \$800 million for union contracts, WMATA, and other expenses. Within DHS, officials have claimed the agency cannot afford to divert sufficient staff to stand up the SNAP increase. However, the OCFO previously certified that the \$39.6 million would be sufficient to cover administrative and staffing costs. The Council worked closely with DHS during the legislative process when passing the Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act of 2022 to craft a Committee Print that minimized administrative costs.

What makes your refusal to comply with the law and increase SNAP benefits more troubling is the crisis at DHS regarding timeliness of processing public benefit applications. DHS is currently under a partial hiring freeze, leaving them understaffed while the District is the worst performing

state in the country with respect to processing SNAP applications. In Fiscal Year 2022, the District had the [lowest rate in the country](#) for application processing timeliness at just 42.9%, with the second worst being Guam at 65.9%. The same understaffed DHS team that processes SNAP applications is also tasked with processing Medicaid renewals. It is then perhaps unsurprising, but no less frustrating, that there are more than 18,500 Medicaid renewal applications pending, and that 43% of renewal applications have been pending for more than 60 days. If you recall, the Council funded 18 new positions at DHS in the FY 2024 budget in response to concerns about staffing for processing vouchers and other public benefit programs. To our knowledge, none of these positions has been filled.

Your administration has chronically underfunded public benefit enrollment and allotments, and now you claim that you can ignore the law and decline to implement the SNAP increase because of spending pressures that you have created and that are neither unforeseen nor new. We told District residents this money was coming because the law provided for it. Now, as we enter the holiday season, residents will learn that this sorely needed support is no longer on the horizon.

We urge you to reconsider your decision, respect the budget that the Council passed and you signed, and direct DHS to prioritize timely implementation of the SNAP increase.

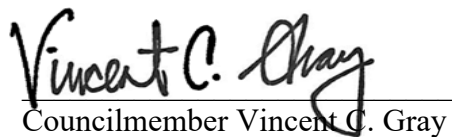
Sincerely,



Chairman Phil Mendelson



Councilmember Anita Bonds



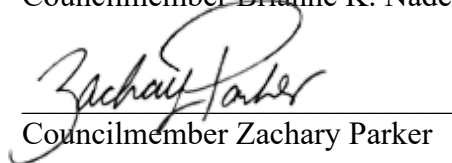
Councilmember Vincent C. Gray



Councilmember Janeese Lewis George



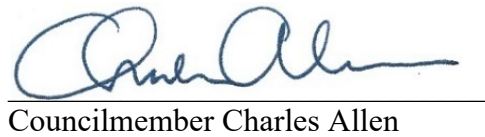
Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau



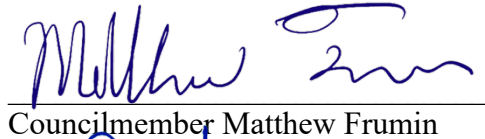
Councilmember Zachary Parker



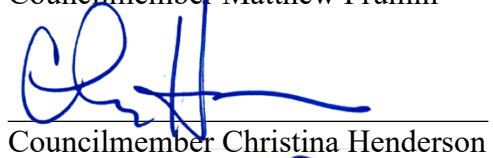
Councilmember Trayon White, Sr.



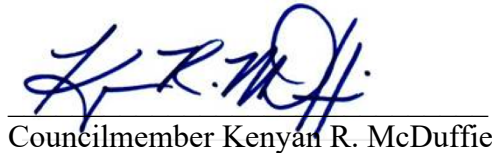
Councilmember Charles Allen



Councilmember Matthew Frumin



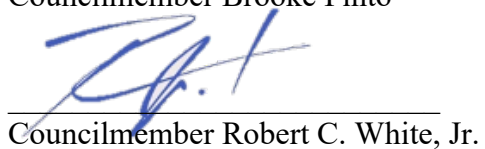
Councilmember Christina Henderson



Councilmember Kenyan R. McDuffie



Councilmember Brooke Pinto



Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.