

Back to Basics

GLAA Policy Brief 2026

The logo for GLAA features the letters 'GLAA' in a large, blue, serif font. A stylized red and white striped banner, reminiscent of the American flag, is draped across the 'A's.

*FIGHTING FOR LGBTQ LIBERATION
IN D.C. SINCE 1971*



Back to Basics: GLAA 2026 Policy Brief

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Founded in 1971, GLAA is an all-volunteer, non-partisan, non-profit civic organization. GLAA serves as a network of people committed to defending human rights and advocating for the advancement of LGBTQ+ people in the District of Columbia. GLAA is the nation's oldest continuously active LGBTQ+ civil rights organization.

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Introduction

GLAA's 2026 policy brief is a recommitment to promoting and affirming the basics: basic human rights, basic human needs, and basic human decency.

GLAA is fundamentally an LGBTQ+ organization. LGBTQ+ or queer is an umbrella term for the naturally occurring variations of sexual and gender identities. Queer people are distributed throughout every family in roughly the same proportion. **If we can get organized, a queer community could decide many elections. *Our queer siblings are among the privileged and the dispossessed.*** For LGBTQ+ people this can be an opportunity and an obligation.

Queer identity is an invitation to solidarity.

In DC, the organizing and advocacy at the center of resistance to authoritarianism is often led by members of the LGBTQ+ immigrant community. It is not an accident that our movements are being led by those who live (both theoretically and geographically) at the borders and intersections.

In this election cycle, the People of Washington DC have exciting choices. Among this smorgasbord of electoral options it is especially important to make it clear where each candidate stands on the issues that matter.

GLAA's policy brief is an invitation and call to action! When we do better to support those at the margins, we see an increase in our collective wellbeing. Using a "queer lens" we can see radical and concrete ways that the District can use our power to uplift us all.

Basic Human Rights

Our right to self-governance, never truly fulfilled in DC, is under threat. The President and Congress have launched unprecedented attacks on DC's home rule over the past year.

In 2025, leaders of Congress took more actions to interfere with DC than to address the national problems that they are supposed to handle, introducing scores of bills to repeal local DC laws. More than a dozen were passed by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. And the House of Representatives approved 8 of these bills to reverse policies approved by DC's duly-elected representatives. Most of these House-passed bills would overturn evidence-based and successful policies that make DC safer, such as detaining people pretrial based on risk and not ability to pay bail, giving judges more discretion in sentencing for some young adults, and providing the opportunity for people who received lengthy sentences as young adults to petition for early release with proof of their growth. Most cruelly, the 119th Congress intentionally removed \$1.1B from DC's own money from our budget.

Others attack the very structure of our limited government, such as by removing our ability to elect our Attorney General or have any say in the selection of our local judges. Although some bills directly target our LGBTQ+ communities (repealing our human rights protections for transgender people for example) we must keep our focus on all of them, as every single one would harm our communities. The legislators who support these bills should be ashamed of their blatantly anti-democratic nature.

Fight for Home Rule

We demand that DC's leaders hold the line for District residents. We demand that the government use every tool available to defend our communities. In 2023 we saw a democratic-led Congress overturn a bill the DC Council unanimously passed. The bill reformed our criminal code to bring more justice to our communities, so that the law could be administered consistently and fairly. It was written after years of study and consensus building and implemented some best practices from jurisdictions across the US. The Council could have passed the law again, fighting back to defend DC's right to administer the District's own laws. We demand the kind of action modeled most recently by the Council Chair and Attorney General who upheld the right to pass our own laws when Congress failed to pass a disapproval resolution of the Council's decoupling tax legislation with sufficient speed.

Stop Enabling Federal Overreach

The federal overreach into DC's governance is not new. We have seen continued overreach by Federal officials into DC's governance, extending into the halls of the Capitol, where Congress continues to pass bills that cut hundreds of millions in local funds to needed human services. The overreach is more than an injury against our rights, it is a threat to the safety and health of hundreds of DC families. As Congress and the President attack our budgets and laws; we demand that our leaders use all of their powers to protect DC's residents from these injustices.

The Council and the Mayor must have greater visibility and presence in advocating for the interests of the District. The deployment of National Guard troops and the weaponization of the Department of Homeland Security and Park Police against DC residents is historic and shocking. Still more shocking is the collaboration from DC's own elected officials, including the Mayor's participation in the federal taskforce that is facilitating the increased deployment of federal law enforcement in the District. Last year the Office of Police Complaints received a record number of allegations of police misconduct. This increase was driven by the onset of increased collaboration between MPD and federal law enforcement which corresponded with a 17% increase in weekly complaints following their implementation.

The Council and Mayor must stop all collaboration and cooperation between DC and federal immigration enforcement. The Council could pass the Safe Community Places and Policing Amendment Act, and use their oversight and legislative powers to stop the DC Department of Transportation from sharing DMV data with ICE. As always, we expect that any collaboration with law enforcement agencies broadly must be limited and include strong safeguards for the rights and safety of DC residents.

Invest in a Just Legal System

The Council and Mayor must take steps to better protect communities in DC that are under attack. We demand investments in courts and the justice system as safe spaces that advance human rights. A critical component to protecting rights is due process for criminal and civil litigants.

For criminal defendants, pretrial detention undermines the right to a presumption of innocence until proven guilty, causes harm, and doesn't prevent violence. Prior to 2024, DC's pretrial detention law – dictating when a person accused of a crime but presumed innocent should be jailed pending the trial's outcome – was the gold standard for the

country. And it worked: 92 percent of people released pretrial were not rearrested and only 1 percent were rearrested for a violent offense. But in 2023 the Council and Mayor broadened the presumption for pretrial detention, leading to hundreds more people being locked up while awaiting trial.

Detention for even one day has the ability to make irrevocable negative changes to a person's life, like losing a job or housing, which can lead to higher crime rates. People are locked up pretrial at the DC Jail, where deaths outpace the national average and conditions are deplorable. Wisely, the Council made the expansion temporary, and it is time to let this policy mistake expire. With crime rates at historic lows and the harms of criminalization and imprisonment clear as ever, we call on our leaders to commit to violence prevention, decriminalization, and support.

District residents' safety, health, housing, and economic stability are also supported by access to civil legal help. Whereas there are Constitutional protections for representation in criminal matters, defendants who cannot afford attorneys in civil matters lack this protection. Lack of access to civil legal support is an equity issue, with DC's most vulnerable – children, elders, individuals with disabilities, immigrant communities, and others falling into the justice gap. DC needs leaders who will promote democracy, stand up to bullies, and support due process. Congress and the White House are threatening the hard-won progress we have made in the District of Peace: in particular by attacking immigrants, transgender people, and youth. **We need leaders who will meet the moment and stand up for DC.**

***Supporting access to basic human needs can help
heal some of the harms of the past, sustain lives
today, and build brighter futures.***

Basic Human Needs

We deserve a government that exists to promote human peace and flourishing; not to serve corporate interests that extract, exhaust, and exploit us.

The good news is that the more that we invest in the health and wellbeing of our community, the greater the returns. A robust social safety net is correlated to lower stress, lower crime, and lower healthcare costs.

Research demonstrates that unconditional housing and basic income programs pay for themselves in improvements to health outcomes and lower unemployment. These programs put dollars into communities that circulate many times over, generating multiplier effects for the public purse and public health. Dollars spent on improving access to quality food, quality schools, and quality homes yield the obvious benefits of well-fed, educated, and housed communities and the extra benefit of investing in an economy of farmers, teachers, and builders.

Safe and Warm Homes

Washington DC is in a housing crisis. According to the Fair Budget Coalition, family homelessness in DC increased by 39% from 2023 to 2025. Homelessness is so severely destabilizing that without a safe place to sleep at night, all other goals are unthinkable. Meanwhile, longtime residents have watched as the rising cost of living transforms the demographics and architecture of the District's historic neighborhoods. We call on our leaders to address the crisis of housing instability and affordability by strengthening and enforcing existing laws such as the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act and new legislation to leverage District resources like the Housing Production Trust Fund to the fullest extent possible to benefit our communities.

The Fair Budget Coalition estimates that the DC Council could end chronic family homelessness using these methods for \$217 million. It would certainly be a worthwhile investment to help families through circumstances of precarity. It is much more efficient to pay someone's rent than have them experience the destabilizing impact of an eviction.

There are many housing solutions that prevent displacement while allowing housing development to progress. The District has ongoing investments into homeownership and permanent affordability. Further, social housing has a long record of success in creating long-lasting, permanently affordable housing. By valuing housing as a human right, not a luxury good or corporate investment opportunity, social housing programs have proven to be more affordable, and create positive cycles of growth.

Abundant and Nutritious Food

We believe that food is a basic human right, and every DC resident deserves access to affordable, high-quality, nutritious foods. When it comes to food, DC should have a culture of abundance. We must address food insecurity through creative solutions that tackle the root causes of hunger, ensuring equitable access across the District.

DC is blessed with a community of local food producers who are leading the nation in urban farming, farm-to-table, and promoting equity using gardens to create positive cycles of growth. This is a dignified approach to healthy food access that has the power to meet the unique needs of all District residents.

At minimum, the Council should increase nutrition assistance program benefits to fill the gap created by the federal government's funding cuts. Cash assistance programs put resources into the hands of District residents, which further supports local businesses when those dollars are spent. **The District can and must improve food security for queer families, older adults, and other households.**

Equitable and Resilient Infrastructure

The critical importance of our infrastructure projects was reinforced by the disastrous leak of hundreds of millions of gallons of sewage into the Potomac River this winter. Among all the investments we must make in our future, we include investments in access to clean water and clean energy. The impacts of climate change and a transforming information economy mean that our Council and the Mayor will have to contend with big business clawing for increased portions of the energy and water that are produced in the region. To meet the infrastructure needs of the future the District government will need to think strategically and build long-term partners.

We call on our leaders to prioritize securing access to affordable, high-quality public goods for the people over the profits of corporations. Governments should help people survive, anticipate and prevent disasters, and promote wellbeing. Investments in basic human needs helps us to grow as a society, building a sense of ourselves that is bigger than the sum of our parts.

We want our elected leaders to promote an uplifting vision of government.

Basic Human Decency

There are myriad options for promoting basic human decency through good governance. We present here three key ways to promote a diverse and vibrant culture and spend the District's resources on programs that liberate instead of control.

Despite a fractured and divided political arena, over the years of Home Rule DC Government has made concrete wins for human flourishing now and in the future. The DC Council has invested in a guaranteed Paid Family Leave program, achieved 95.5% health insurance coverage, and created over 20 different classes of human rights protections.

Healthcare is a Human Right

Untreated illness wastes human potential, goes against our sense of right and wrong, and makes us all less healthy. This shared value is why DC's Medicaid program provides generous coverage for many families, and since 2001, why the DC Health Care Alliance program has provided insurance to families who were otherwise ineligible for Medicaid. This includes recent immigrants, returning citizens, and the undocumented.

Yet, in the 2025 budget season the Mayor and Council cut eligibility for the Health Care Alliance program, reducing benefits and cutting insurance coverage for an estimated 10,000 people. These changes were made in the name of a balanced budget. But, instead of dropping people from insurance rolls, DC should promote a culture of health. Like catching a cancer early, preventive care has lower costs on the patient and the healthcare system. Preventive care is often less invasive, cheaper, and has far fewer detrimental impacts on the patient's quality of life. Preventive care avoids suffering, promotes flourishing, and saves money.

Why is the District balancing the budget off the backs of the poorest and most disenfranchised members of our community?

It is particularly critical at this moment to ensure access to healthcare for transgender people. Policies should guarantee access to healthcare as a human right and smart investment.

Access to Public Benefits

Programs must be accessible to beneficiaries. Our leaders should demand that public benefits are designed to be used with ease. There is no reason why accessing public benefits should be painful or shameful – as LGBTQ+ communities, we must remain vigilant against stigma. Our leaders should be promoting a culture of dignity and care throughout the District’s government, not making programs harder to use by reducing investments in constituent service and eliminating points of entry.

We see opportunities across public programs:

- 1) The incoming Medicaid work requirements are an example. Work requirements for Medicaid are a waste of time and money. While complying with federal requirements, the District can reduce their negative impact by creating simple, humane, and accessible systems for program beneficiaries. They can also design generous carveouts for people with chronic illness, disabilities, child and/or elder care, and education responsibilities.
- 2) A second good example is programs that help people get easy access to identification documents without a permanent address, or don’t match the gender on their original birth certificate. These programs expand access to other benefits and promote stability and safety for people as they move through their daily lives.
- 3) A third example is public transportation. Public transportation is a public good, enabling more efficient economic activity. Instead of investing in higher fare gates and police patrols that put vulnerable residents in harm’s way, the District could fully fund WMATA through sustainable sources such as our transit workers’ proposal to establish a land value tax and using transit-oriented development tools that have been implemented for years in other jurisdictions.

As always, the solution will need to fit the unique circumstances of the issue. We encourage District leaders to listen to the communities closest to the problems, who will often have the most innovative solutions.

Fighting Crime at the Source

We want the DC government to make better and deeper investments that address the root causes of harm and fight crime at the source. Many of the issues currently addressed by the District's criminal laws would be better addressed by public health programs. Laws criminalizing sex work, loitering, and drug possession expose already marginalized people, especially LGBTQ+ folks, to police violence and incarceration.

Criminalization of sex work harms sex workers by making them targets of violence and stigma from both the community and the police. These issues are worse for Black and brown, indigenous, transgender, and immigrant sex workers, who live at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

These laws are sources of corruption in the District and undermine trust in the justice system. Better investments in violence prevention programs could dramatically reduce harm and avoid abuse. For example, decriminalization allows sex workers to better organize for their own safety, and it reduces violence and the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The United Nations Human Rights Council, the World Health Organization, UNAIDS, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch have all stated that criminalizing adult consensual sex is incompatible with the human right to personal autonomy and privacy.

Conclusion

Over the next four years the District will have to hold difficult conversations about the budget. The Trump Administration's expulsion of thousands of government employees and termination of billions of dollars in federal funding have decimated Washington's tax revenues as thousands of working people lost their jobs and many more lost their financial security. The uncertainty of federal actions on the economy could be balanced by the steady hand of the District's leaders. Our leaders should not treat DC as a playground for billionaires and millionaires to flex their petty egos (or flaunt their pretty logos). We want our leaders to follow the evidence and make investments in pro-worker programs that promote human flourishing, reduce stress, and relieve suffering.