

Car Ownership & Repair Assistance

Important Note: There is almost no such thing as a completely "free" car. Most programs below are "low-cost" ownership programs where you pay a small fee (approx. \$900) for a reliable vehicle. **You generally cannot apply directly; a Case Manager must refer you.**

Vehicles for Change (VFC)

- **Best For:** Residents of Maryland and Northern Virginia who have a job offer or are currently working.
- **What They Offer:** They award cars to low-income families for a low price (often around \$900 or a low-interest loan). The cars are fully inspected and repaired.
- **Eligibility:**
 - Must be referred by a sponsoring agency (like Dept of Social Services or a workforce program).
 - Must work at least 30 hours/week.
 - Must have a valid driver's license and be insurable.
 - Must have cash for taxes, tags, and title (approx. \$500).
- **Website:** vehiclesforchange.org

1-800-Charity Cars (FreeCharityCars.org)

- **Best For:** National waiting list (Long shot, but legit).
- **What They Offer:** A legitimate national non-profit that awards donated vehicles to struggling families.
- **How it Works:** You create a profile on their website and "crowdfund" votes/support. It is competitive and takes a long time, but cars are awarded free of charge.
- **Website:** freecharitycars.org

Working Cars for Working Families

- **Best For:** Finding local non-profits.
- **What They Offer:** This is a national database run by the National Consumer Law Center. It doesn't give cars directly but provides a searchable map of legitimate non-profits in DC/MD that help with car ownership or repair loans.
- **Website:** workingcarsforworkingfamilies.org

Car Repair Assistance (Keeping the Car You Have)

- **Shepherd's Table (Silver Spring/PG):**
 - **What They Offer:** Sometimes offers small "barrier removal" grants that can be used for emergency car repairs if the car is needed for employment.
 - **Phone:** (301) 585-6463
- **Department of Social Services (Diversionary Funds):**

- **What They Offer:** If a car repair (e.g., new brakes, tires) is the *only* thing stopping a TANF/SNAP recipient from accepting a job, a case manager can authorize a one-time payment to a mechanic.
 - **Action:** Ask your DSS caseworker about "Work Participation" or "Diversionary" funds.
- **Salvation Army (National Capital Area):**
 - **What They Offer:** Emergency assistance funds that, on a case-by-case basis, may be approved for critical car repairs to prevent job loss.
 - **Phone:** (202) 678-9770