

True Reformer Building  
1200 U Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 328-5500  
www.legalclinic.org

#### Board

John R. Jacob  
President  
Susan M. Hoffman  
Vice President  
James E. Rocap, III  
Treasurer  
Emily Whiting  
Secretary  
Jonathan L. Abram  
Cheryl K. Barnes  
Jeffrey D. Bauman  
Nancy Tyler Bernstine  
Laurie B. Davis  
Wesley R. Heppler  
Allison M. Holt  
Sam Mondry-Cohen  
Sterling Morris  
David E. Rogers  
Valerie E. Ross  
Tiana L. Russell  
Jeff Schwaber  
Stanley O. Sher  
Effie Smith  
Marsha Tucker  
Laura Tuell  
David Wittenstein

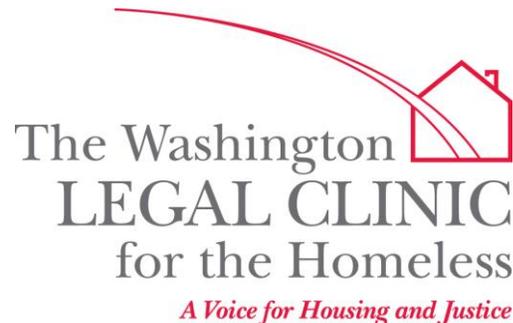
#### *Semper Nobiscum*

Mary Ann Luby  
1940 - 2010

#### Staff

Patricia Mullahy Fugere  
*Executive Director*  
Renata Aguilera-Titus  
*Communications Manager*  
LaJuan Brooks  
*Administrative Assistant*  
Caitlin Cocilova\*  
*Staff Attorney*  
Akela D. Crawford  
*Staff Attorney*  
Amber W. Harding  
*Staff Attorney*  
David M. Booth  
*Disability Rights Initiative*  
Dea C. Lott  
*Staff Attorney*  
Kristi Matthews  
*Kressley Fellow for  
Grassroots Advocacy*  
Scott McNeilly  
*Staff Attorney*  
William R. Merrifield, Jr.  
*Staff Attorney*  
Becky O'Brien  
*Staff Attorney*  
Leslie Plant  
*Administrator*  
Ann Marie Staudenmaier  
*Staff Attorney*  
Max Tipping  
*Equal Justice Works Fellow  
Sponsored by  
Greenberg Traurig, LLP  
and Steptoe & Johnson LLP*  
Kelsey Vaughan  
*Volunteer Coordinator*

\*Admitted only in Pennsylvania



Testimony before the DC Council  
Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization  
Budget Hearing on the DC Housing Authority (DCHA)  
Presented by Amber W. Harding  
May 4, 2017

Good morning Councilmember Bonds and members of the Committee. My name is Amber Harding and I am an attorney at the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless. The Legal Clinic envisions – and since 1987 has worked towards – a just and inclusive community for all residents of the District of Columbia, where housing is a human right and where every individual and family has equal access to the resources they need to thrive.

I was here all day Monday when my colleague and I were delivering our report on the problems with DC's rapid re-housing program. At the same time, an action occurred as part of #DConStrike-- eviction notices directed at each Councilmember and the Mayor for failure to invest in affordable housing. We talked to some people on the Council who were surprised, or even hurt. This reaction, in and of itself, is worrisome.

More and more lately, I see that the community and elected leaders are a world apart in how they view the urgency of affordable housing. I see tenants who aren't going to stand for developer buy-outs or propaganda about creating "new" communities anymore, who expect their elected leaders to stand with them, not with developers. I see homeless families who are done being told they should be grateful for any help they get, when what they get is clearly not right or adequate. I see people in shelters when I do rights talks shaking their heads at me when I tell them that their elected officials want to hear from them. They don't believe it. Because they come down here and share their pain and nothing changes... they're still in shelter.

I see my own child, asking why education is free but housing isn't.

I see my colleagues racking their brains every year for new, more powerful, ways to convince elected officials that housing matters as much as education. That housing matters more than almost anything else. That housing is health care. Public safety. Food. Education. Justice. That nothing goes right when you don't have housing. Maybe if we had better data, or graphs, or a really relatable story, or a huge



rally. But we get those things, and it doesn't matter, at least not enough. Mayor Bowser stood in front of over 600 people, primarily people who need housing, and told them that all it takes to end homelessness is political will. And then days later, she put out a budget that didn't.

The message is clear, to some of us anyway. We hear elected officials talking about ending homelessness or investing in affordable housing, but we *see* you investing those precious dollars in street cars and a Wizard's facility. We hear elected officials talking about DC's devastating income inequality, but we *see* you furthering that inequality by giving tax breaks to the heirs of millionaires. We hear elected officials talking about having to fund all the tax cuts because they were part of a package, but we *see* you failing to fully fund other plans that help poor people, like the District's own strategic plan to end homelessness.

Those eviction notices probably won't be the last of the actions that make elected officials uncomfortable. But imagine the level of discomfort, pain, panic, when DC residents get eviction notices on their doors. People feel desperate. Unheard. So they get louder and less polite. You may not like how the message is being sent, but it's hard to argue with the words. DC elected leaders are *not* doing enough to solve the affordable housing crisis. You aren't doing enough to even solve the worst of the crisis, by taking real steps to end homelessness. We're beyond the point of thanking you for having that as a goal. We need you to do it.

So let's be clear about what the Mayor's budget does and doesn't do, and what work you have ahead of you. The Mayor's budget:

- ✓ Provides permanent affordable housing to about 200 additional homeless families, far less than the number of new families who become homeless every year. (We're not counting the increase in rapid re-housing, which is neither affordable nor permanent.)
- ✓ Ends chronic homelessness for about 260 individuals.

The Mayor's budget does not have enough funds to:

- ✓ End family homelessness by 2018;
- ✓ End chronic homelessness by 2017;
- ✓ House a single family on the DC Housing Authority wait list unless they are in shelter;
- ✓ Meet the entire need for family shelter with DC General or its replacements—DC will continue to pay \$80,000 a night for “overflow” shelter in motels across the region;
- ✓ Stop the only door to affordable housing from being through emergency shelter;
- ✓ Stop the overreliance on the failing Rapid Re-housing program to get families out of shelter or provide enough housing to mitigate harm to families terminated for time limits;

Specific asks (same as Fair Budget Coalition and the Way Home Campaign):

1. End homelessness for 1094 families (about 2188 children) by adding:
  - \$7 million in LRSP vouchers (466 homeless families on the DCHA waitlist)
  - \$6.3 million in Permanent Supportive Housing (200 homeless families)
  - \*\$8.3 million in Targeted Affordable Housing vouchers (428 homeless families)
2. End chronic homelessness for 1061 men and women by adding:
  - \$5.9 million in Permanent Supportive Housing (373 households);
  - \$4 million in Targeted Affordable Housing vouchers (325 households); and
  - \$3.7 million in Rapid Re-housing (343 households)

\*On May 1, the Legal Clinic released a report on DC's rapid re-housing program entitled *SET UP TO FAIL*. The report analyzes the experiences of over 100 families in the program, as well as data provided by the Department of Human Services and national sources, and concludes that homeless families in rapid re-housing struggle with terrible housing conditions, are severely rent burdened, and often are sued in eviction court, *while they are in the program*. Then, homeless families are routinely terminated from assistance for reaching an arbitrary time limit, despite the fact that the average income of participants is far *less* than the average rent. It is mathematically impossible for these families to sustain housing post-termination. Along with Bread for the City, Children's Law Center, DC Law Students in Court, and the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, the Legal Clinic has signed on to the attached letter asking Councilmember Nadeau to redirect the Mayor's proposed \$3.8 million increase in rapid re-housing to this committee for long-term housing vouchers for families through the Targeted Affordable Housing program, or TAH. (The letter also asks for a moratorium on terminations for arbitrary time limits.)

It should be noted that in order to accomplish this shift away from rapid re-housing, there is a need to streamline the referral process for TAH. Families in rapid re-housing have to go through a number of complicated steps to get connected to TAH, and there a number of ways to simplify the process and get the money out the door much more quickly. DHS, for instance, could just send a list of names over to DC Housing Authority and that agency could handle the application process on its own. (That's actually how most voucher "set-asides" work at the DC Housing Authority.)

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.