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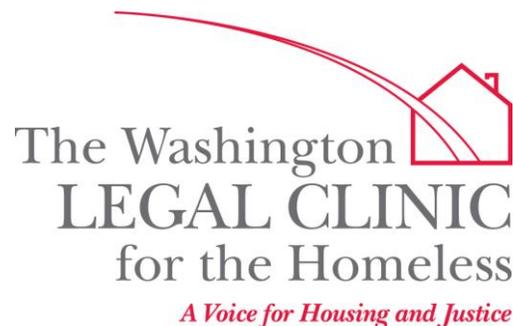
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## Testimony before the Committee of the Whole Hearing on the Budget Support Act Presented by Amber W. Harding May 12, 2017

Good morning Chairman Mendelson 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 think we all agree that DC has an affordable housing crisis of massive proportions, and that homelessness is the acute, urgent edge of that crisis. We all know that housing ends homelessness. It's literally that simple. And yet we're not getting it done.

Two years ago, Mayor Bowser and the DC Council finalized a budget that fully funded the first year of DC's plan to end homelessness. It was more money than had been dedicated to ending homelessness since before the recession. It worked. This year's point in time count showed a 10% reduction in homelessness. Homelessness is still extraordinarily high in DC, and still higher than it was in 2008. But, particularly for families, this is a reversal in a disturbing trend of increasing homelessness for the past decade.

That success won't last if the DC Council isn't able to find significantly more money for ending homelessness in this year's budget. Last year was not a good year for increasing investments, and so far this budget is even worse. The Mayor only proposed enough funds in FY18 to end the homelessness of about 200 families and 260 chronically homeless individuals with permanent affordable housing.



Ending homelessness shouldn't just be a priority. It should be your top priority. Here's what that would look like:

1. Stop expanding programs that mask instead of meet needs. As Petula Dvorak recently stated in the Post: "Affordable housing requires real, permanent solutions, not smoke and mirrors." Rapid Re-housing for families may be an excellent tool for exiting families from shelter, but it does not provide stable, safe or affordable housing to homeless families. Families are severely rent burdened while in the program (40-60% of income *plus* utilities), so much so that 45% end up in eviction court *while* receiving a subsidy and services. Families rent from slumlords (Sanford Capital received over \$100,000 in rapid re-housing subsidies in one month) and have no chance in a fight to fix conditions. DC spends \$11 million per year on services intended to increase incomes so the families can eventually afford their rent on their own, but only 10% of families increase their income and the average income remains under \$500 a month. In fact, 70% of participants are on TANF. Then, families get terminated for reaching a time limit, often regardless of their income or their situation. They face eviction, destroyed credit, and a return to homelessness. DC's family rapid re-housing program has roughly half the success rate of permanent supportive housing or tenant vouchers, quite literally a failing program by our analysis, yet it is the size of our entire LRSP voucher program, and still growing. The \$3.8 million increase in this program should be used for LRSP vouchers for families instead.

2. Make sure affordable housing dollars are focused on those with the greatest need. The new \$10 million preservation fund has no affordability or income requirements attached, so it is unlikely to be targeted at preserving deeply affordable housing. The Housing Production Trust Fund will have \$100 million in this budget, but not one dime will build deeply affordable housing if the Council doesn't find matching operating dollars from LRSP. Even if that money is found, only \$40 million will go to deeply affordable housing. There will be no public housing repairs funded by unspent money in LRSP, because this will be the second year in a row that there's no new money in LRSP. We need much more of our housing dollars targeted to those most in need.

3. Spend DC's money on ending homelessness before spending money on other priorities. DC has a fortune. Elected leaders are just spending more of it on things like savings, tax cuts, and noncritical programs than they would if homelessness were their top priority. Everyone would call me irresponsible if I took a trip to Disneyworld with my kids when I couldn't pay my mortgage. People would probably take my children away if I turned over my paycheck to a wealthy family in Georgetown while my kids went without dinner. But this Council does just that when it makes decisions

to fund noncritical programs and tax breaks that benefit the wealthy while DC residents suffer, while they cannot even get basic needs met.

It's not ok to spend money on the streetcar, which not one person relies on for transportation in this city, and then claim not to have any money to literally save the lives of people living on the street. It's not ok to give tax breaks to the heirs of millionaires while families live with feces in their tubs, while children grow up in DC General. It's not ok to fund for-profit billionaire sports teams' facilities while leaving 40,000 households on a waiting list with no hope of ever getting affordable housing. It's not ok.

DC has a fortune. Spend it wisely. Spend it *first* on lifesaving programs like affordable housing.

Our specific asks are:

1. End homelessness for an additional 1094 families (about 2188 children):
  - \$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 an additional 1061 men and women:
  - \$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).
3. Fund the Fair Criminal Records Screening Act at \$470,000 so it can go into effect October 1.
4. Fund \$25 million in public housing repairs.
5. Devote 50% of the Housing Production Trust Fund to the lowest income renters (0-30% AMI) and add \$7 million in project/sponsor based LRSP to make sure HPTF builds deeply affordable units.