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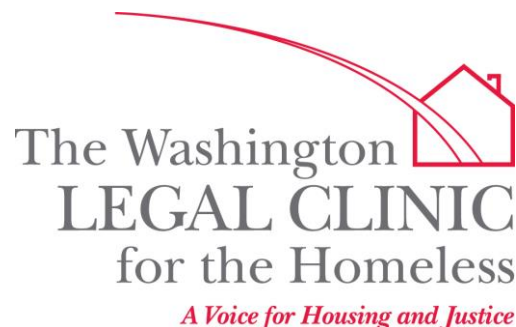
#### *Semper Nobiscum*

Mary Ann Luby  
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Testimony before the DC Council  
Committee on the Judiciary  
Budget Hearing on the Office of Human Rights (OHR)  
Presented by Amber W. Harding  
May 9, 2017

Good morning Councilmember Allen 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 co-chair, along with Teresa Rainey from the Office of Human Rights, an Interagency Council on Homelessness workgroup on eliminating barriers to rental housing for DC residents experiencing homelessness. This workgroup is critical to accomplishing Homeward DC's objective of ending homelessness because many people experiencing homelessness are struggling to find a landlord who will accept them as tenants even when they can afford the rent via adequate income or a housing subsidy. Of all the barriers that exist for applicants, our workgroup identified credit, rental history, criminal history and voucher discrimination as the most prevalent and significant barriers.

Members of our workgroup worked very collaboratively with Councilmember McDuffie last session when he chaired this committee to develop the legislation now called the Fair Criminal Records Screening Act for Housing. As you know, it passed unanimously in December. Unfortunately, the Mayor did not dedicate any funding to the act and it will not go into effect until the Council identifies \$470,000 for FY18. The funds will go to the Office of Human Rights to develop public education materials and enforce the legislation. This law is a critical tool for ending homelessness, reducing crime, and remedying institutional racism and other biases.



As I testified in support of the bill last summer, People with criminal records in DC cannot compete with other applicants for the limited pool of apartments. My clients with criminal records are often told not to bother applying or are denied as soon as the record is discovered. For those with more recent convictions, lack of housing impacts both the individual and public safety overall. Not only does housing reduce recidivism, but it also makes it far easier for parole officers and supportive services providers to monitor and track the activities of those on parole. The greater the housing stability of ex-offenders, the lower the risk of reoffending.

Allowing landlords to broadly deny housing applicants based on their criminal records increases discrimination and compounds the racism and other “isms” of the criminal justice system. People who are homeless in DC are more likely to be people of color, more likely to be LGBTQ, more likely to have mental health or addiction disorders, and more likely to get stopped by police for doing what those of us with homes have the luxury of doing in private: sleeping, urinating, laying down belongings, and asking for help. Homelessness is far more costly, fiscally and morally, than providing housing.

To that end, we ask you to fund the Fair Criminal Records Screening Act for Housing so it can go into effect October 1. But don’t stop there—we know that fair housing protections mean nothing to people who are homeless if they can’t afford the housing. We ask you to take some of the resources in this committee currently dedicated to the police or currently pegged to benefit the heirs of millionaires and businesses-- and instead devote those funds to increasing affordable housing programs that end homelessness.

Our specific asks (same as Fair Budget Coalition and the Way Home Campaign) are:

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)

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.