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The Washington
LEGAL CLINIC
for the Homeless

A Voice for Housing and Justice

**Keynote Remarks by Patty Mullahy Fugere
at the People for Fairness Coalition Homeless Vigil
December 19, 2014**

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On December 21, 1991, I attended my first Homeless Persons Memorial Day service, right here on Freedom Plaza. We gathered then, as we do today, to celebrate the lives and mourn the passing of those who died homeless right here in the nation's capital.

Much has happened in the 23 years since that day....

- The District became a pilot jurisdiction for a new federal approach for addressing homelessness – then Assistant Secretary Cuomo's "Continuum of Care."
- DC was placed under, then ultimately released from, Congressional control and the imposition of the Financial Control Board.
- Most housing and social service programs fell under some kind of court intervention.
- The City shut down the old Capital City Inn welfare motel, and the Trust Clinic Shelter, the Pierce School Shelter, the Foggy Bottom Trailers, Crummell Trailers, MLK trailers, and Randall, Gales, and Franklin, not because the shelters weren't needed, but because the residents weren't wanted.
- Continuums of Care were transitioned to 10 year plans to end homelessness, with DC issuing its first ten year plan in 2004. Ten years later, we haven't succeeded.
- Homeless Families were placed at DC Village shelter next to the waste treatment plant, and then moved to DC General, next to the morgue and the jail.
- DC lost half of its affordable housing stock as the waiting list for subsidized housing swelled to more than 70,000 households. Now the list is closed and young families have no hope of even getting on the list.
- We have lost political allies like Dave Clarke and John Wilson and Marion Barry, and we have lost advocacy partners like Nancy Lee Head, Brian Anders and Mary Ann Luby.
- And we have lost neighbors and friends, like Yetta Adams who died in a bus shelter across the street from HUD, Jesus Blanco who died just a stone's throw from a shelter on a frigid night, and Juan Pastor who died on the steps of a church downtown while officials were resisting opening up the Franklin School – and hundreds of others like them, whose names have been recited at too many vigils on too many cold December days and nights.



But good things have happened since 12/21/91, too.

- “Housing Ready” has made way for “Housing First.”
- The Dignity of homeless families has been affirmed by our Council and upheld by our Courts
- The advocacy landscape has changed – and it is no longer so lonely in the District building...
 - Fair Budget Coalition was birthed and recently celebrated a 20th anniversary;
 - Empower DC has emerged as a force to be reckoned with;
 - Housing for All has united a wide range of stakeholders to advocate for housing justice;
 - The Way Home Campaign is showing us that it is possible to end chronic homelessness – and end it soon;
 - and of course, there is the People for Fairness Coalition. I love the PFFC. I am humbled by – and in awe of - these extraordinary allies, advocates, activists and friends who have such a faithful presence across the street whenever issues impacting our neighbors who are homeless are being discussed.

- And because the advocacy landscape has changed...
 - Shelter residents’ rights and shelter providers’ responsibilities have been incorporated into law.
 - The Local Rent Supplement Program and other important programs have been created and well-funded.
 - There is an Interagency Council on Homelessness that – while very far from perfect – provides a forum for collaboration across stakeholder communities, towards a shared goal of ending homelessness, and a great director of the ICH in Kristy Greenwalt.
 - And DC has been declared a human rights city.

Six years ago, the DC Council declared DC to be the first human rights city in the US. Sadly, the Council stopped short of giving “Human Rights City” any meaningful definition. We so often think about Human Rights in the international context, in terms of torture and trafficking and mistreatment of prisoners or refugees. But we need not venture far from home to think about how fundamental human rights are to us here and now, in this place, in this time, in this community. But in 2008, the Council left a void. So it is up to us now to fill that void. What the Council left unstated, we will state today....

What do you think being a human rights city means?

- Folks must be able to work in decent and safe conditions, and for a fair wage.
- Folks must have clean and healthy water and food.
- Folks must have access to health care.
- Children should have the opportunity to learn...and to play
- All residents must have a decent safe and affordable place to call home.

Let us commit ourselves to working towards a human rights city, to honor the memory of all those whose passing we mourn today.

To honor:

Oliver Isnaga "Carlos" Berroa
Talbert Mitchell Bright
Bernice Brown
Charles Geoffrey Campbell
Janelle Clipper
Darren Dirks
Jane Doe
John Doe

We call upon our government and pledge ourselves to welcome back into community those who are returning from incarceration and do all we can to make sure they can access jobs and housing.

To honor the memory of:

Michelle Easley
Daniel Ellis
Jaime Escamilla
Angel Evans
Jose Flores
Phil Harris
James Higdon
Holley Holley

We call upon our government and pledge ourselves to work to establish wages that are truly living wages that allow workers to support themselves and their families here in DC.

To honor the memory of:

Brenda Jaiye
Jeffery Johnson
Michael T. Johnson
Amos Milburn Jones
Michael Leslie
William Lewis
Zomai Mominzada
Charles B. Newton

We call upon our government to assure and pledge ourselves to work for a safety net that supports community members who because of disability or family circumstance cannot work.

To honor the memory of:

Eugene Porter
Randy Pressley
Rashard Raigns
Annette Rouse
Robert Shafley
Veda Simpson
Onk'yun Smith
Anthony Thomas

We call upon our government and pledge ourselves to work for adequate funding for programs that work: ERAP and LRSP and PSH and public housing.

To honor the memory of:

Curtis Thomasoh
John Tillman
Hilda Venson
Francis Ward
Isaiah Williams
Kermit Williams

We call upon our government and pledge ourselves to no longer allow the forces of economic development to displace long time District residents.

For all those whose names might otherwise be read on this occasion next year, but whose lives might be spared if we honor the human rights and dignity of all DC residents,

We call upon our government and pledge ourselves to work to truly be a human rights city...to end homelessness in our time and assure all DC residents have a safe and decent place to call home.

We were quite a sight last night, walking down 14th street with our grave markers. I carried John Tillman's and I felt like I had been given this sacred trust, that we all had been given this sacred trust...to work towards a time when we no longer need to gather to memorialize those who have passed while experiencing homelessness.

As I think of sacred trust, I think of this sacred time of year. My very favorite Christmas hymn is O Holy Night. Last night was a Holy Night, a sacred night. I didn't have the strength or courage to sleep out all night; I am profoundly grateful to those of you who did. "The thrill of hope, a weary world rejoices" the hymn says. Right here, right now, we are a place of hope and a people of hope, and we rejoice to have been touched by those whom we mourn today and to have one another's companionship on this journey to a more just and inclusive community, a human rights community, a community that says Deaths no More.