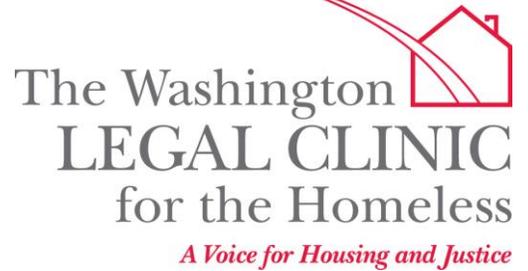


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**Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole  
Budget Hearing on the FY 2016 Budget Support and Budget Request Acts  
Presented by Patricia Mullahy Fugere  
May 8, 2015**

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Council. My name is Patty Mullahy Fugere and I am the executive director of 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. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you this morning some thoughts about the FY 2016 Budget.

I would like to start out by saying that this is an extraordinary time. Never in my 35 years of working on affordable housing and homelessness issues in DC have I felt so hopeful that we could end chronic homelessness and bring acute instances of homelessness to a minimum and assure that they are short-lived. There is knowledge about the issue and concern in the broader community that we haven't seen since the residents of the District of Columbia passed Initiative 17, the right to shelter, in 1984. As was obvious in last year's primary and general elections, the people of DC are saying "No more!" Not "No more of my tax dollars on shelter," but rather "No more ignoring the problem," "No more failure to invest in real solutions," "No more Relisha Rudd's." What is so extraordinary about now is that there is a confluence of forces that would allow us to tackle the challenges of homelessness once and for all: community support, mayoral ownership and investment, knowledge of what does – and does not – work, really smart people in positions of authority over this issue, and – if there is the political will here at the Council – the resources needed to achieve the community's goals.

Now specifically with regard to the FY 2016 budget, the Legal Clinic strongly supports the Mayor's investments human needs, including all of her investments in ending homelessness and providing income-support for low-income children. Yet the Mayor's proposals do not go quite far enough, leaving some very critical needs unfunded. We urge the Council to do two things: first, don't cut any safety net services that have been proposed; and second, use any newly-identified revenue or savings to enhance DC's efforts to end poverty and homelessness, not to undo the sales tax increase.

If the Council fails to find additional money to support such enhanced efforts, here's what we think will happen:

- DC will not end chronic homelessness by 2017, which it has committed to do;



- DC will not move a single household off the more than 41,000 household DCHA waiting list unless that household already is in the homeless services system. All of the Mayor's increases to Local Rent Supplement Program and all turnover in the federal and local vouchers will go to people in the homeless services system, but many people who are homeless and have been on the waiting list for years, if not decades, are not in that system. Our proposal to dedicate \$5 million additional to LRSP vouchers would end homelessness for 333 homeless families on the waiting list, preventing their entry into the homeless services system. (You can find more details about this and our other recommendations on the attached summary.)
- DC will not serve any homeless minors who are pregnant or parenting, so those minors will struggle with no help until they reach 18.

Investments to avoid such consequences are compassionate to be sure, but beyond compassion, they are a smart and efficient use of public resources.

With regard to TANF, we urge the Council to support the Mayor's delay to the TANF cut. Without this delay, DC would end all benefits to more than 6,000 of the District's most vulnerable families. Without this extension, more than 13,000 children will fall deeper into poverty, threatening their success and well-being in the short- and long-term. Studies show that families that have been on TANF for more than 60 months during their lifetimes face deep and complex barriers to employment, including serious physical and mental health conditions, low cognitive functioning, and low levels of education. The District is poised, via the ICH Plan, to address our family homelessness crisis head on, but cutting benefits to zero for families like these threatens the success of the Plan. National research shows that such families cut off TANF do not replace the lost benefits with employment income. Rather, they fall deeper into poverty and turn to more expensive government systems for help such as the emergency shelter system and the child welfare system. Like forty-four other states have done, the District should develop a reasonable extension policy for families with significant barriers to work. And we must eliminate the waiting period for employment services. When these two goals are achieved, we can more fairly address the legitimacy of TANF time limits in the District.

As I noted at the beginning of my testimony, this is an extraordinary time. I hope that years from now, we don't look back and lament a missed opportunity to assure that all DC residents have a place to call home.