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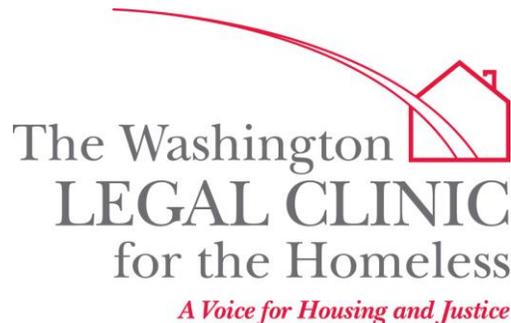
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**Testimony before the DC Council Committee of the Whole
Oversight Hearing on the DC Interagency Council on Homelessness
Presented by Max Tipping
March 3, 2016**

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Council. My name is Max Tipping and I am an Equal Justice Works fellow 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. My testimony today will focus on the District’s rapid re-housing program and how we measure success for families in the program.

As you know, DC’s rapid re-housing program is a time-limited rental subsidy paired with case management that is designed to help homeless families quickly move back into housing. This program is the linchpin of the system re-design envisioned by the ICH Homeward DC plan, which projects that nearly two-thirds of families will exit shelter via rapid re-housing. In practice, nearly all families that exit shelter do so with rapid re-housing. Given the District’s heavy reliance on this program, it is crucial that we have a realistic understanding of the outcomes of families that go through rapid re-housing.

DC Data on Rapid Re-housing

DHS claims that rapid re-housing has a success rate of about 85 percent. For a number of reasons, this figure is very misleading. According to the most recent data available, approximately 85 percent of families exited the program to permanent destinations. The other 15 percent likely exited to temporary destinations or the shelter system. In addition, the recidivism rate, or families that returned to shelter after exiting to a permanent destination, is 15 percent. We can therefore assume that at least 27 percent of the 1,088 families currently in the program will not be “successful.”

However, this figure is just the starting point and does not account for the flaws of our current data collection methods. Most importantly, once a family stops receiving a subsidy, there is no direct follow-up to determine their housing outcomes. A family is only included in the recidivism rate if they have reapplied for shelter and that application was entered

into the HMIS data management system. As a result, the 15 percent recidivism rate mentioned above fails to capture many families that exit rapid re-housing to permanent destinations but subsequently lose their housing. For example, if a family is evicted and doubles up with family, or stays in a DC domestic violence shelter, or enters a shelter in Maryland or Virginia, they are still counted as successful. Based on the experiences of DC legal services providers that have worked with a number of such uncounted families, as well as the results of the Family Options Study described below, I would estimate that at least 10 percent of families that exit to permanent destinations later lose their housing without being counted by HMIS. This is likely a conservative estimate. After taking these families into account, the success rate drops to approximately 65 percent, with nearly 400 families failing to maintain their housing.

A final consideration would be the number of families exiting rapid re-housing to a long-term subsidy. While it is reasonable to consider families' connection to a long-term subsidy to be a successful housing outcome, it also suggests that those families would not have been able to afford to remain in housing without that continued assistance. The most recent DHS data shows that 20 percent of families exit rapid re-housing with a long-term subsidy. After taking this final figure into account, it appears that we can expect *less than half* of the families currently in to program to be able to independently maintain their housing at the end of the subsidy period.

National Data on Rapid Re-housing

The data from rapid re-housing programs in most other communities is presented and examined in a manner that is similarly uncritical and unrealistic. The only large-scale, methodically-sound research that has been done on rapid re-housing outcomes is the HUD-sponsored Family Options Study. This study is following nearly 2,300 families in 12 communities that were randomly assigned to receive priority access to a long-term housing voucher, rapid re-housing, transitional housing, or “usual care” (usually emergency shelter). So far, families' outcomes have been reported for 20 months after random assignment, and a final report will be issued after evaluating the outcomes at the 36 month mark.

The data collected by this study is wide-ranging, but there are two particular findings that are especially relevant to rapid re-housing. First, the outcomes of families that were given priority access to rapid re-housing were no better than the outcomes of families assigned to receive “usual care.” More specifically, there was no measureable difference between these two groups in terms of housing stability, family preservation, and general well-being. Second, families that were given priority access to long-term housing vouchers experienced outcomes that were significantly better than those of families assigned to rapid re-housing. This effect was most clear in terms of housing stability, with reductions in homelessness and doubling up, but there were also reductions in domestic violence and economic stress. Put more simply, this study demonstrated that family outcomes from rapid re-housing are no

better than those associated with “usual care,” and family outcomes from long-term housing vouchers are far better than those associated with rapid re-housing.

The federal government has already taken these findings to heart. The President’s recently proposed budget requests \$11 billion in new spending over ten years for housing assistance for homeless families. Approximately 80 percent of this funding would go towards new long-term housing vouchers, with the remainder funding additional rapid re-housing assistance. In explaining these funding priorities, the White House budget office stated that “this significant investment is based on recent rigorous research that found that families who utilized vouchers – compared to alternative forms of assistance to the homeless – had fewer incidents of homelessness, child separations, intimate partner violence and school moves, less food insecurity, and generally less economic stress.”

Next Steps

To be clear, I am not advocating for DC’s rapid re-housing program to be entirely scrapped. However, if we take a more realistic look at rapid re-housing outcomes, as the federal government has, I believe we will find that families are better served, both in terms of cost and outcomes, by focusing more of our resources on long-term housing. I would ask that the Council encourage the ICH to seriously consider whether Homeward DC’s heavy reliance on rapid re-housing is misguided and whether our community will instead need to rely on long-term housing vouchers if we are to successfully re-design the family homeless services system.