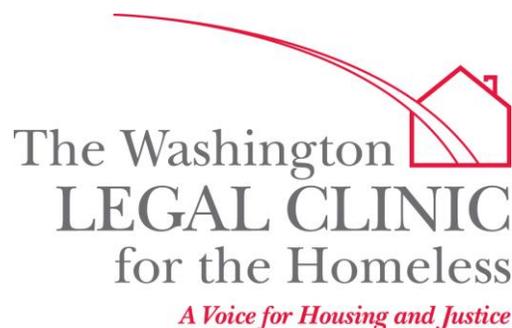


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Testimony before the DC Council
Committee on Health and Human Services
FY17 Budget Oversight Hearing on DC's Department of Human Services
Presented by Nassim Moshiree
April 20, 2016

Good afternoon Councilmember Alexander and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name Nassim Moshiree and I'm an attorney with 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. The Legal Clinic is a member of the DC Fair Budget Coalition, and we strongly support the entirety of Fair Budget platform.

My testimony today will specifically address the need to increase affordable housing investments and fill the gaps in the Second Year of Homeward DC to keep us on track to end homelessness in DC. These include:

- \$4.9 million to support 455 individuals with Rapid Rehousing
- \$3.9 million to support 242 individuals in Permanent Supportive Housing
- \$6.2 million to support 230 families in Permanent Supportive Housing
- \$5.5 million to support 455 individuals with Targeted Affordable Housing vouchers
- \$2.1 million to support 104 families with Targeted Affordable Housing vouchers

It is critical to fill these gaps and increase affordable housing investments for the following reasons:

If we do not fill the gaps, DC will not meet its goals of ending chronic homelessness by 2018 and all homelessness by 2020.

Last spring, the Interagency Council on Homelessness (“ICH”) adopted a comprehensive and detailed Strategic Plan (“Homeward DC”) to make homelessness in the District rare, brief, and nonrecurring by 2020. Homeward DC provides a smart, humane, and achievable blueprint for ending homelessness as we know it, and for this, it has garnered unprecedented and widespread support. Unfortunately, the Mayor’s proposed budget for FY17 falls far short of funding

many of the second year objectives of the plan which are crucial to its success, specifically investments in housing to help exit both families and individuals from shelter.

The Mayor's budget makes no investment to serve individuals who are homeless with Rapid-Rehousing ("RRH"), as called for in Homeward DC. RRH provides short-term rental assistance to help those facing a housing crisis get back on their feet. It has been used as the main tool to exit families from shelter in recent years, but it has not yet been expanded to individuals.

There is not nearly enough Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for singles in the Mayor's budget, and there is *no* increase in funding to serve families in PSH. (The Mayor's FY17 budget plans to serve 300 individuals with PSH. With 780 individuals identified as chronically homeless in the District, this falls far short of meeting the need.) PSH provides long-term affordable housing with wrap-around services to chronically homeless residents who need those services to remain housed. It is a proven and critical investment to end chronic homelessness, and data shows that it costs DC less to provide PSH than to leave these residents homeless.

(My colleague will be testifying about the importance of funding for Targeted Affordable Housing (TAH) and the Local Rent Supplement Program at tomorrow's DCHA hearing.)

Housing investments are critical to a functioning family shelter system that has adequate capacity to meet legal obligations and provide year-round shelter access to homeless families.

We have seen an unprecedented number of families in shelter over the past several years. As of April 11th, there were 869 families just in overflow motels. Hundreds more live in DC General and in apartment-style shelters. We support the Mayor's efforts to replace DC General with smaller, safer, more dignified shelters around the District, but the success of that replacement plan hinges on our ability to exit families quickly from shelter.

Investments in housing are also key to realizing the goal of year-round access to shelter for families, an expressed commitment of this Administration. Through the leadership of Director Zeilinger, last summer, DHS placed over 450 families in crisis into shelter. However, not all families who needed emergency shelter received it. And already this spring, there are families with small children who have no place to go and are still not able access shelter on the nights they need it. As the DHS responses to this committee's budget oversight questions state, year-round access to shelter "will create a more effective and efficient crisis response system for families." However, the Mayor's proposed budget does not include enough housing assistance to exit families from shelter quickly. We are closer than ever to ensuring that no child in DC spends one night sleeping on the street, in a car, or in some other unsafe situation, but it's going to take a commitment of District funds to make this a reality.

And finally, homelessness is a pervasive problem for many in our community, not just those who currently use our homeless services system.

Recently, the DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers released a report on its *Community Listening Project*. The Project was a three-and-a-half year effort to hear directly from low-income community members about their most significant needs and challenges. Nearly 600 low-income DC residents were surveyed and 130 community members participated in focus groups. Lack of adequate, affordable housing and fear of homelessness emerged as the dominant concern among survey participants. More than one-third considered problems related to housing to be the most serious problems they had experienced in the past 2 years, and when asked to identify the kind of help that people in their community most need, almost 40% of the survey participants said “housing.” Only 30% of those surveyed were homeless, but close to 60% expressed a fear of becoming homeless. (The report can be found at: <http://www.lawhelp.org/dc/resource/community-listening-project>)

This is why fully funding the second year objectives of Homeward DC is so critical. The Council now plays a crucial role in keeping us on track to actually end homelessness as we know it in the District, not just through oversight, but by funding the housing gaps in the Mayor’s budget.