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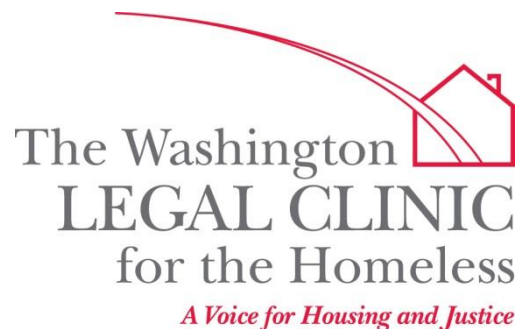
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D.C. Council Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Budget Oversight  
Hearing –  
April 11, 2019

Good afternoon, Councilmembers. I am Brittany K. Ruffin, an Affordable Housing Advocacy Attorney at the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless. Since 1987, the WLCH has envisioned and 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. Unfortunately, our vision is still that—a vision. Currently, there is no right to housing; and, it is hard for the vast majority of our vulnerable residents to focus on thriving when basic survival has become such a challenge.

Mayor Bowser claims to believe that housing in D.C. is the most pressing issue for current residents. Yet, her proposed budget does not reflect a strong commitment to recognizing or prioritizing that belief. DCHA is the landlord for approximately 20,000 of D.C.'s most vulnerable residents. For years, residents have complained about the deplorable conditions and dilapidated buildings in which they have been forced to reside.

In December, DCHA released the findings of an evaluation of the public housing stock. The data confirmed what residents already knew, but the extent of the damage and deterioration—a product of decades of neglect and mismanagement—is appalling. Though the entire stock is riddled with a variety of structural and health hazard issues, a total of 2,610 units were labeled as being in “extremely urgent” need. Perhaps, a critical issue with the discussions regarding funding is how the problems are characterized. Units have been labeled as being in immediate and extremely urgent need of repair. But, the fact is that within these units are real people—families, children, mothers, fathers, grandparents. These families want to live in safe and stable housing that does not cause their health to suffer. Units are not in danger, but the families residing within them are. These families deserve the basic respect and decency of living in safe housing, and that requires an action of substantial investment from the city that is long overdue.

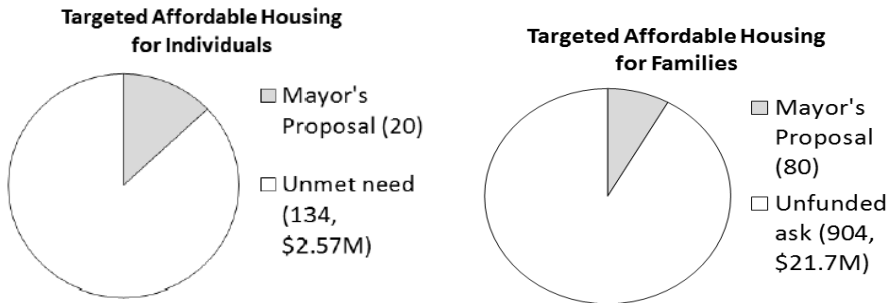
There have been many ongoing conversations about what the state of public housing in D.C. will look like in the future. There are important questions to be answered and decisions to be made. There are things we simply do not know right now. However, we do know that residents are suffering NOW. People are inhaling mold and lead dust NOW. Seniors are discovering elevated lead levels in their blood NOW. Parents are fighting rodent and roach infestations NOW. Children are spending nights in the hospital, being diagnosed with asthma, and having their overall quality of life decreased NOW. Regardless of the eventual decisions that will be made about public housing structuring, the City of D.C. has a duty to protect its residents NOW.

DCHA's original funding requests detailed that it would take \$343 million to repair and maintain all of the issues that were uncovered during the assessments for just one year. It would require \$1.3 billion over ten years. Of course, those are large numbers. However, "sticker shock" should not equate to a dismissal of the very tangible problems that DCHA residents continue to face. The alternative to funding one hundred percent of the need should not be dismissal and a decision to fund zero percent of the need.

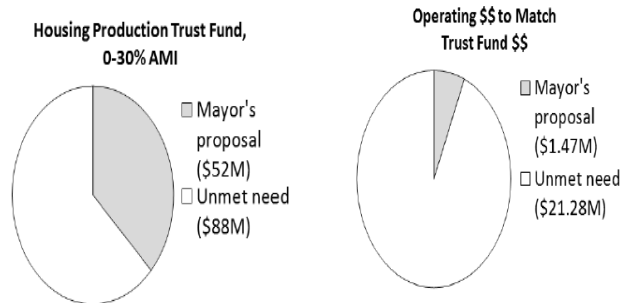
Recently, on a smaller scale, DCHA has communicated that it would need \$30 million per year for ten years in order to address the capital needs of twenty-five properties, including the fourteen requiring the most urgent action and those containing lead that house children under the age of six. While twenty-five properties is slightly under half of the total public housing stock, it is a start. It will not fix everything, but *any* financial effort to acknowledge and address the reality of substandard housing that D.C. residents are enduring is better than *no* effort. With a \$15.5 billion budget, it is unconscionable that *not one single cent* of that has been set aside to contribute to the improvement of the conditions within the buildings that house 20,000 D.C. residents.

Similarly, Mayor Bowser has also chosen to designate zero dollars in her budget to creating new tenant vouchers. Despite the claim of interest in prioritizing housing needs, no effort has been made in this budget to address the 40,000 families currently languishing on DCHA's waitlist in an attempt to receive housing. Typically, families are on the waitlist for more than a decade before receiving a voucher. Those families are the ones "lucky" enough to have even been able to get on the waitlist before it closed six years ago. The Fair Budget Coalition, of which WLCH is a founding member, made a request of Mayor Bowser to fund vouchers for at least 500 waitlisted families in the budget. Certainly, that number is only a "drop in the bucket" as far as the overall need goes; but, for 500 families currently waiting for stable and permanent housing, it would mean everything. The mayor's proposed budget grants zero dollars and reflects zero interest in addressing or acknowledging the thousands of families hoping to be housed.

We are pleased that Mayor Bowser has planned to increase funds for Permanent Supportive Housing and Targeted Affordable Housing for families and chronically homeless individuals. However, the overall remaining need far outweighs that which she has proposed to fund. The mayor’s budget funds Targeted Affordable Housing for 80 families. Even after funding that, approximately 904 families will still be without the Targeted Affordable Housing that they need. The mayor’s budget increase means that 325 chronically homeless individuals would be able to receive Permanent Supportive Housing and Targeted Affordable Housing. Unfortunately, there would still be approximately 795 chronically homeless individuals of our budget “ask” that are left without housing.



The Housing Production Trust Fund is the primary source for the creation of affordable housing. While the mayor’s \$30 million increase to the HPTF is an extremely worthy investment, the proposed portion that is supposed to go towards creating/preserving housing for the most extremely rent-burdened residents (living within the 0-30% AMI range) sounds better in theory than in practice. The proposed \$52million could create approximately 286 units of housing for those who need it the most. Unfortunately, Mayor Bowser’s budget failed to include the necessary matching money in operating dollars to actually build those units. With a paltry operating budget proposal of \$1.47 million, D.C. would only *actually* be able to barely fund 50 units. Once again, those who most critically need housing in this city are set to get the short end of the stick.



There have been several publications that have detailed the extent of the challenges that D.C. faces as it confronts its affordable housing crisis and racial inequities. The D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute issued a report indicating that 27,000 new units of affordable housing are needed to house D.C.'s residents living within the 0-30% AMI level. Minority residents account for nine out of ten of those extremely low-income households. According to DCHA, eighty-five percent of the residents in its properties are within the 0-30% AMI level. HUD data shows that the number of homeless individuals in D.C. increased by thirty-four percent between 2009 and 2016. D.C. was at the top of the national list in 2016 for homelessness. In 2011, the Black population dropped below fifty percent for the first time in over fifty years. However, Black people currently make up eighty-eight percent of D.C.'s homeless population. A recent Washington Post article described data indicating that Washington D.C. has the highest intensity of gentrification of any other city in the nation. Despite an overall population influx, more than twenty-thousand Black residents were displaced from D.C. neighborhoods between 2000 and 2013.

Meanwhile, despite all of the striking data regarding the demographic transformation of the city and the dire need for affordable housing for extremely low-income households, big development and luxury residential properties have continued to flourish throughout the city. Mayor Bowser has suggested spending \$122 million to create a brand new K Street transit way. Yet, not one dollar could be found for critical repairs to public housing conditions that affect 20,000 residents or the creation of vouchers to house even a small number of the 40,000 waitlisted families? Fully funding the operating budget to make sure that the money allocated for creating housing in the HPTF would actually be used for that purpose was not a primary consideration? Creating affordable housing, ending homelessness, and racial equity cannot be consistently touted as D.C. priorities if the funding in the budget does not reflect that. This Committee and the Council must step in to assert the critical needs of D.C. residents as *the* priority in this budget. A \$15.5 billion budget consisting of \$8.6 billion in local funds simply demands it.