



Council of the District of Columbia

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

March 26, 2021

Mayor Muriel Bowser
Executive Office of the Mayor
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

We are writing to request that you take full advantage of Federal funds to expand non-congregate placements for individuals experiencing homelessness.

On March 17, 2020, you and your team took the important action of utilizing the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance (PA) program funds to commence the Pandemic Emergency Program for Medically Vulnerable Individuals (PEP-V). The goal of PEP-V is to reduce exposure to COVID-19 of elderly and medically vulnerable individuals residing in congregate shelters. We want to commend you for consistently being receptive to community and expert input on ways to improve and expand PEP-V to meet the changing needs of our residents and requirements of the Federal Government. For example, since its inception, you have expanded PEP-V capacity by adding a third hotel and allowing program participants to double-up in rooms. These changes, all implemented in 2020, mean that as of March 18, 2021, 656 eligible individuals were placed in PEP-V instead of a congregate shelter or living unsheltered.

Unfortunately, there remain 656 people referred and waitlisted for a PEP-V placement until more beds open or program capacity is expanded. Of these 656 waitlisted referrals, 35% are currently in shelter and 38% are unsheltered, which demonstrates the critical role that PEP-V plays in ensuring adequate social distancing in the low-barrier shelter system and moving our unsheltered residents indoors. We are concerned that the already sizable waitlist will grow because a handful of the seasonal hypothermia shelters, which have been operating 24/7 to reduce community spread of COVID-19, will be taken offline in the coming days and weeks. The population leaving seasonal hypothermia shelter could overwhelm the low-barrier shelter system, resulting in many more unsheltered residents and a greater risk of COVID-19 community spread. As we work to vaccinate all District residents, it is important to acknowledge the challenge of reaching unsheltered residents and the grave mistake it would be to lose the connections that have been made with people during hypothermia season, as we continue to ramp up vaccination efforts throughout the homeless services system.

The good news is that the District has a real opportunity. In December 2020, FEMA announced that the agency will approve reimbursement for non-congregate sheltering through its PA program for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency. Even more importantly, on January 21,

2021, President Joseph Biden signed an [Executive Order](#) (EO) making FEMA assistance through its PA program available at a 100 percent Federal cost share until September 30, 2021 with a 100% retroactive reimbursement policy. Prior to the January EO, FEMA was only reimbursing 75% of eligible costs.

The District's residents cannot wait any longer for action. We know that FEMA will reimburse 100% of the eligible PEP-V costs. We also know that the District is reducing the capacity of its Isolation and Quarantine (ISAQ) program as the need for it diminishes, which means that the 130+ room Hampton Inn motel should be available to be repurposed for PEP-V. While PEP-V locations are service rich and require a lot of staffing, the decommissioning of ISAQ and the seasonal hypothermia shelters should allow for some staffing resources to be redirected for at least one additional PEP-V location.

We recognize that the FEMA reimbursement will not last forever and that the District Government, in collaboration with our partners in the Federal Government and local provider community will have to work together to help find long-term solutions to the housing and homelessness crisis in the District. The American Rescue Plan includes a number of important elements that should help in these efforts, including:

- \$5 billion nationally for Housing Choice Vouchers for people experiencing homelessness, survivors of domestic violence, and victims of human trafficking;
- \$5 billion nationally through the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, which can be used to provide rental assistance and supportive services, to develop affordable rental housing, to help acquire non-congregate shelter to be converted into permanent affordable housing, or used as emergency shelter; and
- Over \$2 billion in direct payments to the District that can be used to invest in housing resources and other support services.

At the local level, we will need to make major investments in housing subsidies and vouchers as well as continuing to do the work of improving the efficiency and efficacy of the matching and lease up processes for these programs. The majority of people placed in PEP-V are also eligible for Permanent Supportive Housing, which means it is possible to streamline the process of moving them into housing. In fact, at the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) performance oversight hearing, the DCHA director testified that the urgency of moving people from PEP-V into permanent housing helped them establish a new blueprint that will create a more efficient system overall.

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter. We strongly urge you to capitalize on this unique opportunity to fully leverage federal funds to expand the capacity of non-congregate placements in PEP-V and commit to working with the D.C. Council to make transformational investments in our housing resources.

Sincerely,



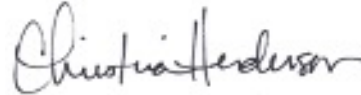
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Councilmember, Ward 1



Janeese Lewis George
Councilmember, Ward 4



Elissa Silverman
Councilmember, At-Large



Christina Henderson
Councilmember, At-Large



Anita Bonds
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Mary Cheh
Councilmember, Ward 3



Robert C. White, Jr.
Councilmember, At-Large



Vincent C. Gray
Councilmember, Ward 7



Kenyan McDuffie
Councilmember, Ward 5

Cc:

Kevin Donahue, City Administrator

Wayne Turnage, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services

Christopher Rodriguez, Director of the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency

Laura Zeilinger, Director of the Department of Human Services

Ronan Gulstone, Director of the Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs

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