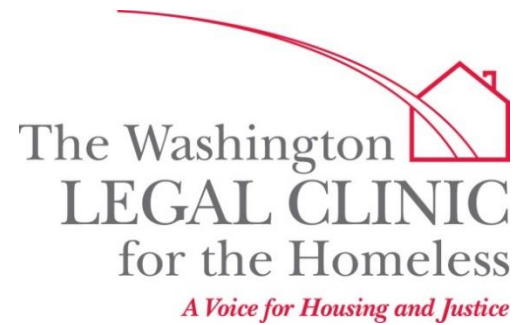


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**Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Human Services
Budget Oversight Hearing on the DC Department of Human Services (DHS)
Amber W. Harding
March 30, 2022**

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. We are members of the Fair Budget Coalition and the Way Home campaign and we strongly support the FY22 and FY23 budget and policy recommendations of both coalitions.

Rent Relief

With the eviction moratorium lifted, DC must ensure residents can access sufficient funds to pay back rent arrears to prevent massive displacement, trauma, and homelessness. We recommended an additional \$187 million in FY22 and \$200 million in FY23—all in the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). The Mayor has proposed increasing ERAP by \$73.9M in FY22 and \$27.7M in FY23 (above the approved FY22 budget). (These numbers include additional federal funding allotments.) That's a great start, particularly when in years past the Mayor has regularly cut ERAP funds in her proposal, but we still have far to go to meet the need.

Ending Homelessness

We are thrilled to see our full asks for Permanent Supportive Housing funded by Mayor Bowser. However, our asks to end family and returning citizen homelessness were not funded at all by the Mayor.

We ask the Council to fund the following vouchers to end homelessness:

- 1040 Targeted Affordable Housing voucher for homeless families
- 800 Local Rent Supplement tenant vouchers for homeless families on the DC Housing Authority waiting list
- 60 Local Rent Supplement tenant vouchers for returning citizens

Rapid Re-housing Reform

The lack of affordable housing in the District of Columbia is a structural, systemic problem with deep roots that demands comprehensive and sustained solutions. Cutting DC residents from rental assistance for hitting a time limit when they cannot afford market rent on their own is unfair, unjust, and will lead to increased evictions and homelessness--disproportionately harming Black residents and other communities of color.

Despite historic permanent housing investments in FY22, 913 families are [slated for termination](#) this year from rapid re-housing for reaching a time limit, even though the Mayor admits that 90% of the families will not be able to afford rent on their own without further assistance. (The program for single adults faces similar challenges but is much smaller in scope.)

It is past time to reform rapid re-housing. We, along with [38 other organizations](#), asked the Mayor to use extra money to extend families until everyone who needs permanent affordable housing gets it, rather than prematurely terminating them from assistance. The Mayor has added an extra \$45.6M to the program this year, as well as an extra \$44.4M for next year, but none of this money comes with commitments to provide families with the rent support they need. With very few permanent housing subsidies in next year's budget so far, we expect to see more time limit terminations next year unless the Council intervenes.

I want to tell you a little about the families who have come to us for help appealing rapid re-housing terminations. While very few families have appealed their terminations, most likely because they have received multiple confusing notices from DHS, we are working with over a dozen families who are facing termination. Despite DHS claiming to have assessed each family for additional housing support and promising that no family would receive an exit notice if they were eligible for another support, every single family we have spoken to is eligible for TAH, PSH, and/or DC Flex.

Many of the parents have disabilities, as do many of the children in the families. Several have experienced domestic violence—one client was assaulted just days before receiving her exit notice. Some have language and immigration barriers to housing. Some are working, but all are unemployed or underemployed. Several have infants and irregular childcare. Several report having no personal safety net-- no friends or family to support them if they become homeless again.

What they all have in common, though, is that they cannot pay the rent without additional help. They all have said they will become homeless if they are exited from the program without any more help. And when I say they cannot pay the rent, I do not mean they will be rent burdened. Only one of our clients is in that situation—she would pay 73% of her income for rent without a subsidy, severely rent burdened by any standard. Every other client has a total monthly income that is *far below* the rent—making it mathematically impossible to stay housed even if they devote every single dollar to rent.

Rapid re-housing is so broken that even funding historic levels of permanent housing did not stop DHS from terminating nearly one third of the families, sending nearly 1000 families reeling into crisis. It is so broken that DC spends \$863 per month per family on case management that only helps a quarter of families increase their incomes at all, and then only an average \$39 per month. (Let's envision a world where instead we just gave families that money, thereby dramatically improving performance outcomes!) It is *so* broken yet, despite such obvious failures *of the program*, only families bear the burden of such failures, never providers and never the government that designed the program in willful blindness to the huge gap between income and market rent in DC.

We are asking the DC Council to:

- 1) Demand that the Mayor immediately withdraw all time-limit termination notices that have been issued by the Department of Human Services (DHS),
- 2) Devote surplus funds to maintain rapid re-housing rental support until every participant has the resources they need to afford housing,

- 3) Increase permanent affordable housing vouchers in next year's budget so that rapid re-housing participants can transition into a program that better maintains housing stability, including Targeted Affordable Housing for families and Local Rent Supplement Program tenant vouchers, and
- 4) Reform rapid re-housing legislatively so that DC residents cannot be terminated for a time limit until they can afford rent without further assistance.