



**Testimony by Caroline Petti  
Chair, Affordable Housing Subcommittee of the  
Committee of 100 on the Federal City**

to the

**COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
October 19, 2016**

**B21-0884, the “Rental Housing Affordability Stabilization Amendment Act of 2016”**

**B21-0880, the “Rent Concession and Rent Ceiling Abolition Clarification Amendment Act of 2016”**

**B21-0885, the “Four-Unit Rental Housing Tenant Grandfathering Amendment Act of 2016”**

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on the bills before us today which are designed to strengthen DC’s rent control program. The original purpose of rent control as established in 1975 was “...to protect low- and moderate-income tenants from the erosion of their income from increased housing costs.” *D.C. Code § 42-3501.02(1)*. Since then, the city has struggled to achieve this worthy promise.

Housing costs in DC are the third highest in the country, leading to rapid displacement of children, their families, and senior citizens with the burden falling heaviest on people of color. Residential communities, particularly in wards west of the Anacostia River in areas like Shaw/U St., Petworth and Columbia Heights are losing people who have lived there for generations. More than half of DC’s renting households spend upwards of 30% of their income on rent.

Rent control continues to be one of the District’s strongest tools for alleviating this affordability crisis. We appreciate Councilmember Bonds and the other sponsors of the legislation before us today for acting proactively to strengthen this important tool. The bills seek to expand tenant opportunities and “put the brakes on” escalating rent control costs by limiting rent increases and by giving tenants a TOPA opportunity before rent control exemptions can be granted. We commend you for these efforts to stabilize costs, maintain the availability of affordable rent controlled housing and offer increased opportunity and predictability to rent control tenants.

We understand that the Department of Housing and Community Development is now compiling an inventory of rent controlled units that will be complete next year. We urge the city to accelerate this process: An accurate database of the location of buildings under rent control, their age and condition, rents charged per unit, and much more, is essential to understanding how rent

control is being implemented, where there are problems, and how they can be fixed.

The answer to our affordable housing crisis lies not in one grand strategy but in steady progression on a combination of measures. New housing is obviously an important element and we commend Mayor Bowser, the Council Committee on Housing and Community Development, and the Council as a whole for the continuing commitment to the city's affordable housing fund.

We are also pleased that substantial attention is being devoted to the preservation of existing low- to-moderate income housing. DC is fortunate to have rental apartment complexes of various sizes scattered throughout our many neighborhoods and we cannot afford to lose them. Preservation will require a far more intentional and detailed strategy than any that the city has employed to date.

The city needs to identify housing preservation as a top priority and make sure we are assembling good data on such basic questions as:

- What financial obstacles do landlords face in repairing and replacing worn out building systems?
- What sources of low-to-no interest loans and other financial support are available to incentivize reinvestment in these buildings while still maintaining affordability?
- How can DHCD improve the usefulness of the database of pre-1975 rent control buildings by adding additional details about building conditions and histories of repairs and replacements?
- Are there DC laws and programs that are inadvertently incentivizing the replacement of existing low or moderate cost rental buildings, either under rent control or not, with new, much higher rent units?
- Preservation and reuse of existing buildings is one of the most environmentally sustainable of all measures a city can take by conserving the embodied energy in that building. Sustainable DC, the city's environmental plan, should address the substantial environmental benefits of preserving buildings and place a higher priority on such preservation.

It will be a challenge to balance the District's preservation, sustainability, and affordability goals as we seek to grow the city in an inclusive and responsible way. We commend your efforts to tackle the many problems of escalating housing costs, measure by measure. We welcome the opportunity to support and assist you in any way.