

The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



Testimony before the Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Council of the District of Columbia Bill 23-0391, the Public Housing Rehabilitation Oversight Task Force Act of 2019

October 30, 2019

I am Kirby Vining, Chair of the Housing Subcommittee of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, presenting testimony on behalf of the Committee of 100 in support of creating a task force to oversee the rehabilitation of the D.C. Housing Authority's housing stock.

As we know all too well, the DCHA has done an abysmal job of maintaining its housing stock. By any standard, the deterioration of some 2,500 of the DCHA units to the point that they are currently described as "uninhabitable" is disgraceful. While the subject of how this happened over several years is important to understand going forward, the greater priority is to adopt a multi-faceted approach to expanding and stabilizing public housing in partnership with families that are threatened with displacement.

The Mayor fails in her overall housing policies to set explicit public housing goals that the city intends to meet. Creation of the Oversight Task Force is a very useful and arguably necessary step to improve the performance of both DCHA and the city. A prime goal should be to recommend public housing policies and future budget requests that demonstrate the District's commitment to safe housing for the homeless and the working poor.

Questions the Task Force should address include:

- How did public housing in DC become a crisis? Is there a link between an increase in demand for public housing and the decrease in subsidized housing because slumlords have failed to meet their contractual obligations to provide safe and decent housing? What additional laws or regulations are required to prevent this from happening in the future?
- What has been the impact of the DC government treating public housing as a federal matter, not a city responsibility?
- What conditions should the District place both on the rehabilitation of these "uninhabitable" units and on the redevelopment of the current sites?
- DCHA and city officials make the assumption that everyone who needs public housing wants to move elsewhere in the city when their homes undergo renovation or rebuilding. This is vigorously challenged by many public housing residents. The "urban

renewal" policies in SW DC in the 1960s and 70's proved disastrous to existing communities. Why not require that DCHA interview the residents who must vacate their homes, even temporarily, to determine whether they want to return -- and then grant them that right?

- How will redevelopment produce enough family-sized units to meet the growing demand? How will the goal of creating vibrant communities be designed into new development without leading to gentrification?
- What level of additional DC funding is required to address the woeful lack of Federal funding as a result of HUD's budget for public housing dropping continuously for the past 20 years?
- What social services should accompany the forced displacement of whole communities in the process of redevelopment?

These are just a few of the many questions the Task Force should address. The Committee of 100 stands ready to work with the Council to ensure that the Oversight Task Force breaks new ground in addressing a massive issue adversely affecting the lives of so many families and communities in our city.