

The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



D.C. Council Committee on Housing and Community Development

Hearing on Bill 23-0121, the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners Qualification and Expansion Amendment Act of 2019

October 30, 2019

Testimony of Andrea Rosen for the Committee of 100 on the Federal City

My name is Andrea Rosen and I am testifying for The Committee of 100 on the Federal City. The Committee of 100 applauds the initiative of Chair Bonds in introducing this very necessary and timely legislation to ensure that the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners is highly experienced and engaged with public housing issues.

Public housing is a critical component of the District's goal of creating housing for a diverse population that will have different housing needs at different stages of life. No aspect of the continuum of housing is more important than sheltering the homeless and residents who can contribute very little to the cost of their housing.

The need for public housing in the District is evidenced by the thousands of residents wait listed for the 8,000 public housing units in the city. But now the entire structure of public housing is challenged by the neglect in maintaining public housing units. The Board of Commissioners is moving to remove residents from 2,500 units that they find are uninhabitable. The Board is also discussing how to fund the very costly repairs or rebuilding that must proceed if the District is to maintain its inventory of public housing units and honor our commitment to provide safe housing for some of our most vulnerable residents.

Chairman Bonds, the Committee of 100 supports your intention to add two Council-appointed members to the Board of Commissioners. Your experience in chairing oversight hearings on the Housing Authority and the Board of Commissioners is evident in your determination to ensure that appointees to the Board of Commissioners have competencies relevant to the challenges facing the Board. In order to guarantee that each board member contributes to the mix of expertise, the Committee of 100 suggests that each of the four public members appointed by the Mayor meet a different competency listed in the legislation, so that a broad range of expertise significant to solving the District's crisis in public housing can be realized.

The Committee of 100 also strongly urges that an organizer experienced in advocating for public housing residents be added as a commissioner. The D. C. Consortium of Legal Service Providers currently appoints a commissioner and that should continue. But the on-the-ground knowledge and experience of a community organizer who is dedicated to advocating for funding, policies, operations, and individual rights would augment the expertise of a housing developer commissioner or a lawyer well versed in public housing regulations but without the hands-on relationships with the public housing community and background in representing their interests before various forums.

We hope this legislation is enacted quickly and that if funding is required, it can be satisfied before the next fiscal year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.