

The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



DC Council Committee on Housing and Executive Administration

Performance Oversight Hearing – DC Housing Authority

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

January 27, 2022

My name is Andrea Rosen, and I am testifying for the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. Thank you for this opportunity to speak before the Housing committee.

Two and a half years ago, I testified for The Committee of 100 in support of your bill, Chairwoman Bonds, entitled the “Housing Authority Board of Commissioners Qualification and Expansion Amendment Act of 2019” (B23-0121). C100 suggested that the bill go further by creating an additional new seat on the Board for an organizer experienced in advocating for residents served by the Housing Authority.

Regrettably, the change in Board composition approved by the Council last year did not redress the imbalance in Board membership between the executive and the legislature, since the single new Council appointee was paired with an additional Mayoral appointee. Mayoral appointees now total five out of eleven members.¹ No position for an organizer was created even though beneficiaries of Housing Authority residences are necessarily constrained in their advocacy by their dependency on the agency. Also missing from the Board is any representation of the not-for-profit development sector.

A Board so constituted will not stanch the Housing Authority’s drift from the mission statement drawn up a decade ago to “*provide quality affordable housing to extremely low- through moderate-income households*”² and to “*foster sustainable communities*”.

As has been said many times, the market will build for the market, but only government will build housing for people who can contribute very little to the cost (i.e., households earning 0-30% MFI). Yet the Housing Authority continues to opt to demolish in lieu of repairing traditional public housing and to prioritize construction of 80% MFI and market-rate housing in its stead. Resident communities are dispersed. The incidental, uncertain delivery of what **at best** is replacement housing delivers no net gain in affordable units for the 43,000 people who have long been on the waiting list for homes.

DCHA now houses more than three times as many residents via vouchers than it does in traditional public housing (40,672 vs. 12,400). The voucher program, too, relies on the private housing market, by utilizing existing

¹ Counting the ex-officio membership of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, the Mayor appoints five of the eleven members of the board, including the Chair; the Council, one. Residents elect three public housing tenants and one voucher holder. A labor union and a consortium of legal services providers appoint two members.

² That is, for households earning *zero to less than 80%* of Median Family Income.

units, which again means no net gain in housing; and by subsidizing new construction in which the great majority of units are for higher-income residents (see above).

If the Housing Authority were less wed to the private-profit model, perhaps it would have advocated to the Mayor to seize the opportunity in the sale of the Marriott Wardman to create a range of affordable housing in a high-opportunity area of the city. There are other sizeable parcels in Ward 3's Friendship Heights, presently occupied by defunct retail and parking lots, where the city could be a contender on behalf of those vulnerable to homelessness.

Public housing residents are not treated as stakeholders, let alone partners, in the housing endeavor; they are presented with done deals and moved about without consent. Emblematic of DCHA's failure to "foster sustainable communities" is the inaction on extending a guarantee of right of return to all public housing tenants at risk of being displaced by renovation or redevelopment, not just those involved in New Communities projects. Chair Bonds, we urge you to move the "Public Housing Preservation and Tenant Protection Act" that was referred to the Committee in 2020.

To enable the Committee to more closely oversee the work of DCHA, we echo the following recommendations of advocates with immediate knowledge of the agency.

- Given recent turnover at the agency, the Committee should ask for an organizational chart showing what positions are unstaffed and who is taking responsibility for the work of such positions.
- The Committee should ask DCHA for data on how local funding for repairs has been spent so far and how remaining funds are budgeted for future spending. The residents who fought for the increased local funding have not been kept apprised.

Again, thank you for your consideration.