

**Testimony of Claire Zippel, Housing Policy Associate
At the Public Hearing on Bill 21-328
“Disposition of District Land for Affordable Housing Clarification Act of 2015”
District of Columbia Committee of the Whole
October 8, 2015**

Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Claire Zippel, the Housing Policy Associate at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI engages in research and public education on budget and policy issues in the District of Columbia, with a particular emphasis on how policies impact low- and moderate-income families.

I am here to support Bill 21-328, the Disposition of District Land for Affordable Housing Clarification Amendment Act of 2015. The bill would extend the affordability requirements that apply when the District disposes of land for residential use to also apply when the District closes a street or alley as part of a residential development of 10 or more units. Under current law, up to 30 percent of housing units built on land disposed of by the city must be set aside as affordable to low- and moderate-income households.

The bill before us today furthers the purpose of the underlying Act by ensuring that the value of public assets are leveraged to create new affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents throughout the District. Like land, streets and alleys, or easements over streets and alleys, have a value, and a portion of that value should help meet one of the District’s greatest needs – affordable housing. We thank the Chairman and Committee for their leadership on this important issue.

We ask that the Committee consider clarifying this bill to make clear that the affordability requirements would be based on the contribution of the public land, or area of the closed alley or street, to the total square footage of the property on which the development is to be built. That is needed to ensure that the affordable housing set aside is tied to the public land in question, and would not apply to any private land included in the project.

We are glad the Committee is concerned with ensuring affordable housing built through public land dispositions is maintained permanently, as expressed in the Committee’s recent report on the disposition of 965 Florida Avenue. Under the current law, the affordability term is the life of the building, which means that the affordable housing the District has invested in through the land disposition is lost if the building is torn down or rebuilt. Maintaining affordability permanently through a covenant that runs with the land, as the Committee suggested in its report, would maximize the value of the public benefit and protect affordability for the future. We suggest that this may be an opportune time to achieve permanent affordability in public lands dispositions.

The Land Disposition for Affordable Housing Act adopted last year is proving to be an effective way for the District to produce much-needed affordable housing and ensure a broad array of

residents benefit from new development. Adopting the Disposition of District Land for Affordable Housing Clarification Act of 2015, and using this opportunity to ensure permanent affordability, will strengthen this key tool for meeting low- and moderate-income families' pressing need for quality, affordable housing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.