



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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## DC Council Should Take Steps to Protect Low-Income Seniors From Extraordinary Rent Increases

By Claire Zippel

With rapidly rising housing costs, the District should take steps to protect remaining sources of stable housing for low-income seniors and people with disabilities, by insulating those who live in rent controlled apartments from extraordinary rent increases. The DC Council is considering several proposals to strengthen the city's rent control rules. One proposal would exempt low-income seniors and people with disabilities from certain rent hikes, and compensate landlords with a tax credit instead. The Council should approve this proposal this Tuesday when it comes to a vote which would ensure many vulnerable DC residents can rely on stable housing costs, at only a modest cost to the city.

Under rent control, rent increases for seniors and people with disabilities are limited to inflation. But under certain circumstances, landlords can use a "housing provider petition" to ask the city for an extra-ordinary rent increase on all tenants. Special rent hikes can be approved to cover the cost of capital improvements or rehabilitation, to increase the owner's rate of return on the property if it's below 12 percent, or if tenants "voluntarily" agree to increase their or future tenants' rents, in exchange for promised renovations or to prevent condo conversion. Between 2007 and 2013, over 260 housing provider petitions were filed, according to the Office of the Tenant Advocate.

Extra-ordinary rent hikes can be damaging to low-income seniors and people with disabilities, many of whom rely on fixed incomes. For people with low or limited incomes, large increases in housing costs often mean cutting other parts of the household budget, such as food, transportation, and medical care—or having to move out, reducing the possibility of aging in place or consistently accessing one's preferred healthcare provider.



One proposal in the [Elderly Tenant and Tenants with Disabilities Protection Amendment Act](#) would exempt seniors and people with disabilities with incomes below 60 percent of the area median (\$65,000 for a family of four) from having to pay significant rent increases due to a housing provider petition. The rent increase would be paid instead through a dollar-for-dollar tax credit, at a relatively modest cost of \$1.25 million per year, according to the Chief Financial Officer. The Council should approve this proposal, which will provide greater stability to many seniors and people with disabilities.