

**Testimony of Claire Zippel, Policy Analyst
At the Public Hearing on Bill 22-663, Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2018
DC Council Committee of the Whole
March 20, 2018**

Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Claire Zippel and I am the housing policy analyst and research coordinator at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes opportunity and widespread prosperity for all residents of the District of Columbia through independent research and thoughtful policy solutions.

The District is a very different place today than it was in 2006, when the city's Comprehensive Plan was last amended. The District has welcomed over 100,000 new residents. An economic resurgence has brought new jobs and businesses to the city. Yet prosperity has not been widely shared. Income inequality is high, and racial inequity is evident across every measure of well-being. Just one example: in 2016, the Black unemployment rate was 16 percent—six times higher than for whites.¹ The District's rapid growth has had downsides too. Most notably, the city's high and rising housing costs have made it difficult for DC's low-income residents, particularly people of color with longtime roots in the District, to keep a roof overhead and a foothold in the city. In all, 26,000 of DC's extremely low-income households face severe housing challenges.²

The current Comprehensive Plan amendment cycle is an opportunity to help steer the city's growth in a more equitable direction. Emphasizing DC's housing challenges in the document that guides its land use policy is a critical step to making future development more inclusive. The Comprehensive Plan should:

- Promote the creation of affordable housing options for all residents, and affirm that those housing options must be equitably distributed throughout the city.
- Ensure the preservation of existing low-cost housing and provide stronger protections against displacement.

These objectives should be the highest priority community benefit whenever the city considers providing zoning relief. Similarly, zoning relief should be an available tool to ensure that new developments maximize affordable housing, and that redevelopments replace existing affordable housing and minimize resident displacement.

While the Office of Planning's proposed amendments to the Framework Element make some mention of the city's housing challenges, we hope that the Office of Planning and this Committee can work together to ensure that the Framework truly centers affordable housing as a key city priority. After all, the story of DC's demographic and economic changes is incomplete without the story of the disappearance of affordable housing—and the particularly outsized impact of rising housing costs on communities of color.

DCFPI worked with other organizations focused on DC's housing challenges to draft suggested amendments to the Comprehensive Plan that would align the plan with the city's urgent housing needs. This set of amendments will be submitted to the record.

Finally, it is important to remember that even the best land use policies will not fully solve the District's affordable housing challenges. Public investment in housing subsidy programs is critical—and is in fact the only way to create housing affordable for extremely low-income residents,³ for whom even modest rents are a burden. We encourage the Council to strengthen funding for affordable housing in fiscal year 2019, with a particular focus on the city's lowest-income residents.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ Linnea Lassiter, DC Fiscal Policy Institute, "[Still Looking for Work: Unemployment in DC Highlights Racial Inequity](#)," 2017.

² Claire Zippel, DC Fiscal Policy Institute, "[A Broken Foundation: Affordable Housing Crisis Threatens DC's Lowest Income Residents](#)," 2016.

³ For more on the relationship between supply-side policies and subsidy, see: McKinsey Global Institute, "[A Blueprint for Addressing the Global Affordable Housing Challenge](#)," 2014.