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**Testimony of Doni Crawford, Policy Analyst
at the Public Hearing on the Comprehensive Plan Amendment Act of 2020
Committee of the Whole
November 12, 2020**

Good morning, Chairperson Mendelson and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Doni Crawford, and I am a policy analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute (DCFPI). DCFPI is a nonprofit organization that promotes budget choices to address DC's racial and economic inequities and to build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations.

I'm here today to urge the Council to pass the Office of Planning's amendments to the Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) intact as soon as possible. I am a resident of Ward 5, and I care deeply about ensuring that DC is a place where all Black and brown residents can live without fear of involuntary displacement and have the same opportunities to experience positive life outcomes in economic security, job retention, and physical and mental well-being as historically entitled to most white residents. District planning policy is a way to achieve this.

This Moment Calls for Dismantling the Structures of Racial Inequality

This week, the Council passed landmark legislation to incorporate racial equity as a key focus of DC government, as envisioned in the Racial Equity Achieves Results (REACH) Amendment Act of 2020.¹ It is therefore timely that the Comp Plan update is before us today because the Comp Plan is one tool that can be used to help dismantle the structures and policies that make Black communities and other communities of color face the greatest housing, economic, health, and environmental inequalities in DC. It can also be used to remedy deeply entrenched racial residential segregation that results in a built environment that leaves many Black residents with poor air quality, limited access to full-service grocery stores, and even intergenerational trauma.²

Racial inequities in DC have gotten worse and continue to be exacerbated by the public health crisis. This is not an accident; this is by design. Black and brown communities have been neglected by public policy for far too long, and we now have the responsibility to ensure that these communities are not further displaced as the District continues to grow. As a result, any new amendments to the Comp Plan should support DC Housing Priorities Coalition guiding principles that will:

- encourage the equitable distribution of affordable housing, especially in affluent neighborhoods;
- meet housing needs at all income levels, especially deeply affordable housing for families with the lowest incomes;
- preserve existing affordable housing; and,
- protect tenants.³

Any new Comp Plan amendments should also support DC Grassroots Planning Coalition guiding principles that will:

- urge the Comp Plan update to benefit residents and communities of color, especially Black residents and communities;
- aim to prevent involuntary physical, economic, and cultural displacement of those residents, and;
- prevent the exacerbation of poverty and racial wealth disparities.⁴

Considerations for the Full Comprehensive Plan Rewrite Process

We support the Council's desire to review and affirm that the Comp Plan reflects the community's values and will achieve our racial equity priorities across the District. Given that the Office of Planning has signaled that a full rewrite of the Comp Plan is on the horizon and will conclude by 2025, the Council should consider incorporating language into this update legislation that will simplify and make that process more accessible and inclusive of residents.

As a paid advocate with a broad policy agenda, this 1,600 page plus redlined document was not easy to follow and wonkier and weedier than even I prefer. The Council can legislate that the forthcoming rewrite incorporate national best practices in comprehensive planning, including that it be high level, accessible, and user friendly; be nimble to address new responses to events such as an unexpected global health pandemic; have mandated specific timeframes for rewrite commencement and completion; and be community driven and formalize more equitable engagement practices.^{5,6}

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

¹ Council of the District of Columbia, [Racial Equity Achieves Change Amendment Act of 2020](#), B23-0038, Second Vote November 10, 2020.

² Brittney Drakeford and Ras Tafari Cannady II, [City planners need to talk about race. The lives of our residents depend on it.](#), Greater Greater Washington, March 12, 2019.

³ Housing Priorities Coalition, [Housing Priorities Coalition - Background](#), Housing Association of Nonprofit Developers (HAND), 2020.

⁴ DC Grassroots Planning Coalition, [About the Coalition](#), 2020.

⁵ Andrew Trueblood, [Letter to DC Council](#), DC Office of Planning, April 2020.

⁶ Alex Baca, [Can DC build a better Comp Plan process? An Office of Planning report hints at "yes."](#), Greater Greater Washington, May 6, 2020.