

November 15, 2021

The Honorable Mayor Muriel Bowser
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

We, the undersigned 43 organizations are writing to ask you to use reserves, underspending from government agencies, and/or other funds not dedicated to help DC residents living on low incomes meet basic needs (including but not limited to affordable housing efforts) to provide eviction prevention funding. The stakes are too high to shut down our eviction prevention efforts now. We estimate the unmet need for rental arrears is approximately \$74.9 million¹, and we ask you to identify at least this much funding to meet this need as well as the need for utility arrears which we are not able to estimate.

We urge you to act quickly to tap existing resources for STAY DC or the Emergency Rental Assistance Program via the STAY DC portal.

Without additional funding for eviction prevention, tens of thousands of DC households could face eviction. (Approximately 13,900 DC households report being behind on rent from September 1st to October 11th according to data provided by us from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.²) With those evictions, DC residents will experience trauma, education and employment disruption, and decreased health outcomes. DC will also likely experience a surge in homelessness, including an increase in encampments and family homelessness, interfering with the progress DC has made towards its goals of ending homelessness.

Housing is healthcare. Every day individuals experiencing homelessness die from preventable and manageable diseases. The connection between housing and healthcare is even more evident during the pandemic when one of the keys to staying healthy is staying at home. Preventing evictions is a key component to preventing community spread of COVID. Eviction prevention is also an issue of racial equity as people of color, especially Black people, and immigrants, have faced higher risk of coronavirus infection, unemployment, and eviction during the pandemic.

DC has obligated 95 percent of the \$352 million dedicated to the STAY DC program, demonstrating great capacity for delivering assistance. The District should not wait for federal funds to arrive before it takes further action to protect DC renters because it is not yet clear when those funds will arrive. Renters need assistance now.

We urge you to use reserves, agency underspending or other sources of funds not dedicated to helping residents living on low incomes meet basic needs.

¹ DC Fiscal Policy Institute analysis of data provided by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Department of Human Services Office of the Director, "[Biweekly Report on COVID-19 Metrics](#)," October 29, 2021.

² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis of the [U.S. Census Bureau Pulse Survey September 1 through October 11th](#)

If the District uses reserves, it is possible that you will be able to replenish them with additional federal Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) funds or other federal funding. The U.S. Department of the Treasury has indicated that other federal funds might be a possibility.

If the District does not receive federal funds or if the federal funding is inadequate to meet the need, the District has a local funding option to replenish reserves. The District could use the half of the FY 2021 surplus that will be dedicated to the Pay-As-You-GO (PAYGO) Capital Account. While the total amount of surplus will not be identified until the Office of Chief Financial Officer completes the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) in February, the recent revenue forecast demonstrates that the District is projected to have at least \$311 million in revenue surplus for FY 2021, in addition to an unknown amount of underspending for that fiscal year.³ By law, half of the fiscal year 2021 surplus will go to PAYGO capital and half to the Housing Production Trust Fund. We recommend redirecting part or all of the portion of the surplus that will go to PAYGO capital to eviction prevention. PAYGO is intended to offset long-term bond borrowing costs for capital projects but given continued low interest rates, this should not be a priority right now.

If not using reserves, the District could reprogram agency underspending from FY 2021 as you have recently asked the Council to allow for security costs that exceeded federal reimbursement.

Finally, you could identify other sources of funding.

We ask that any funding identified for eviction prevention not be diverted from other affordable housing efforts or vital socioeconomic supports and programs. Eviction prevention efforts are essential and lifesaving, but they do not meet residents' need for permanent affordable housing. Redirecting funds from other affordable housing purposes will only undermine this critical goal.

We make these recommendations without knowing the true extent of the need, particularly for utility arrears assistance. At a minimum, we urge you to keep the STAY DC portal open so the District can track the need and make reliable projections on the funding necessary to address those needs.

By funding eviction prevention, DC can begin to undo some of the deep damage of longtime systemic racism as well as the racial harm from COVID.

Sincerely,
Bread for the City
Coalition for the Homeless
Community of Hope
DC Bar Pro Bono Center
DC Behavioral Health Association
DC Central Kitchen
DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
DC Doors
DC Environmental Network
DC Fiscal Policy Institute

³ Office of the Chief Financial Officer. [September 2021 Revised Revenue Estimates for FY 2022 – 2025](#). September 30, 2021.

D.C. Hunger Solutions
DC Jobs with Justice
DC SAFE
DC Statehood Green Party
District of Columbia Primary Care Association
Elaine Ellis Center of Health
Empower DC
Enterprise Community Partners
Everyone Home DC
Foundry United Methodist Church
Friendship Place
Homeless Children's Playtime Project
Jews United for Justice
Latino Economic Development Center
Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia
Many Languages One Voice
Mary's Center
MetroHealth DC
National Community Church
Network for Victim Recovery of DC
Pathways to Housing DC
Positive Force DC
Sasha Bruce Youthwork
SMYAL (Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders)
TENAC (DC Tenants Advocacy Coalition)
The Platform of Hope
Tzedek DC
Unity Health Care
University Legal Services
Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
We are Family Senior Outreach Network
Whitman-Walker Health

cc: Kevin Donahue, City Administrator
Jenny Reed, Director, Office of Budget and Performance Management
Laura Zeilinger, Director, Department of Human Services
Chairman Phil Mendelson
Councilmember Brianne Nadeau
Councilmember Brooke Pinto
Councilmember Mary Cheh
Councilmember Janeese Lewis George
Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie
Councilmember Charles Allen
Councilmember Vince Gray
Councilmember Trayon White
Councilmember Anita Bonds
Councilmember Christina Henderson
Councilmember Elissa Silverman

Councilmember Robert White