TESTIMONY BEFORE THE DC COUNCIL HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

DC WOMEN IN POLITICS

JUNE 3, 2013

I am Anita Bellamy Shelton, a resident of Ward 1, with forty years of social work experience including service to homeless families that extends back to Capital City Inn. Currently, I am President of DC Women in Politics, a diverse non-partisan women's organization which seeks to promote solutions to problems facing women and children in the District of Columbia. The organization attempts to present to policy makers, elected officials and, particularly female Councilmembers the views of women voters on pressing issues that facing women and their children.

DC Women in Politics urges the members of the Committee to postpone until the September Legislative Session a vote on a Homeless Service Amendment Act. The residents of the District of Columbia are aware of the urgency presented by the Executive Branch to move forward with the proposed legislation. With less than 30 days before the Council recesses for the summer, the Council has not had full disclosure by the Executive Branch on the impact of this legislation on children currently housed in DC General. Nor has the Executive Branch in our opinion fully calculated the cost of the implementation of this Act. Finally, we regret to say that the proposed legislation will do little to reduce homelessness and to set into motion services and policies that will improve the lives of homeless families.

For the following reasons we urge the postponement of what appears to be misguided intention by the Executive Branch.

Insufficient information on the impact on children - projected increase in the number of children referred to Child and Family Services

The enactment of the amendments as proposed will result in the unintended consequences of increasing at least a 20% referral by case managers to Child and Family Services. It is our considered judgment that if a parent fails to be placed in rapid housing the responsibility for the children must be reviewed by the Child and Family Services Agency to ascertain if the child will be in a safe environment and not evicted to the streets of DC. In some cases a review by the Agency will result in placing the children in temporary custody or in emergency foster care.

It is appropriate for the Committee to drill the Government witnesses as to how they will address the need for safe shelter for children when their parents are evicted from temporary shelter, because they failed to place money in escrow, violate shelter rules with regard to conduct and behavior. Such families will be required to move within a 24 hour notice and without an opportunity for a fair hearing. The Government has an affirmative responsibility to report to the legislative body what provisions are made in the stature to provide for the needs of children who are adversely affected by their parents' violation of the amendment provisions.

The Government witnesses failure to satisfy the committee members on their efforts to protect children when these provisions are enforced, then we request that the legislation not be enacted, postponed or reintroduced in the September Council sessions.

Inconclusive – misleading information by the Executive Branch on the fiscal impact of the full implementation of the Homeless Service Reform Act Amendment.

It is our understanding that when the proposed amendment was introduced during the budget process that the Executive Branch indicated that the adoption of the provisions of the Act were budget neutral. Or they indicated that there was no budget impact by providing rapid housing, enforcing provisions of the required escrow account, 30% of income into a savings account.

The budget rationale appears to be erroneous and at best misleading. It is difficult to understand how the Executive Branch arrived at its conclusion of no fiscal impact. Currently, the DC General houses 400 families with some 600 children. The cost of this facility, its maintenance and staff will remain constant. The Executive Branch has indicated that they will not close DC General and it will remain a year-round shelter.

The rapid housing placement provision as proposed by the Executive Branch will move families from DC General and place them in subsidized conventional properties. The city would pay rent supplements for 6 months or more. **It appears that the cost of operating DC General facilities will remain constant and added on to the budget would be the additional provision of rapid housing for anywhere from 200 or more families. The economic pressures on poor families in DC would suggest that each time a family moves out of DC General and placed in rapid housing units, another family with an equally compelling needs would be placed in the vacant unit at DC General.**

It appears that funds provided to service homeless families in the DC Council budget for 2014 is insufficient to implement the Rapid Housing Program and sustain services at DC General.

The Human Resources Committee should seek detailed information on the budget impact of the proposed amendments. It is believed that the Committee will find that the Executive Branch has not appropriately considered the cost or in its zealousness to provide new punitive tools has misled the City Council. Thus, the Committee should not recommend the adoption of the fiscal impact statement of the Chief Financial Officer which is required to be accurate before Council approval.

Escrow Accounts

Section 13 (DC Official Code 4-754.13) is amended as follows: "Establish and contribute to a savings or escrow account or other similar savings arrangements if required by law, regulation, or program rules established by provider pursuant to 4-754.32."

Many of the residents, advocates and homeless persons themselves support the idea of saving and the development of ways to facilitate savings even among those who are economically challenged. However, they do not believe that the Executive Branch has appropriately considered the difficulty and the cost of implementing a city-wide savings program for families as well as homeless individuals.

Without a doubt there are costs associated with the implementation of a secure and easily accessible savings program for families. The Government needs to share with the Human Services Committee who will pay for the cost of maintaining savings account, disbursing funds to parents when emergency needs arise and disbursing within a 24-hour period after shelter has been identified, the funds accumulated in individual accounts.

It does not appear that the Executive Branch has adequately considered the cost and effective ways of implementing the mandatory savings or escrow account provisions.

Upon hearing from the Executive Branch inappropriate or insufficient information in several key areas;

- **If the implementation of the provisions of the amendment will not result in an increase in the number of cases referred to Child and Family Services. In addition, if referrals by homeless contractors and staff at DC General will not result in an increased number of families placed in foster care in order to provide for safe and nurturing environment for children while their parents are without temporary housing.**
- **If the Executive Branch has not provided sufficient information to certify by the Council that the proposed amendment to the Homeless Service Reform Act has no budget impact and will be financially neutral, then this Committee should not approve the proposed amendments. Perhaps, the Executive Branch can resubmit a more thoughtful proposal that is designed to prepare families for independence and not penalize them for their current vulnerable and financially challenged status.**