

December 19, 2022

The Hon. Phil Mendelson  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

RE: *District of Columbia Housing Authority Stabilization and Reform Emergency Amendment Act of 2022*

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Fellow Members of the Council of the District of Columbia:

The undersigned organizations write to express deep concern and opposition to the emergency legislation regarding the DC Housing Authority. We urge you to oppose the *District of Columbia Housing Authority Stabilization and Reform Emergency Amendment Act of 2022*, and its many proposed amendments, that would dissolve the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) Board of Commissioners (Board) and replace it with a “Stabilization and Reform” board, diminish the role of residents served by DCHA, and remove all non-mayoral appointees—the only members that have consistently raised many of the issues cited within the HUD Report. Further, the emergency bill fails to address the fundamental problems identified in the HUD report.

As organizations that represent the interests of low-income tenants who reside in DCHA properties or receive DCHA Housing Choice Vouchers, we are interested in reforming the DCHA, but we firmly oppose the pending emergency legislation that would remove critical voices from the Board, including those of resident leaders, and further expand Mayoral control of the Board. The legislation would radically alter the structure and make-up of the Board without public input or well-informed debate. The bill removes the DCHA board member seats selected by labor and housing advocates and reduces representation of elected DCHA residents, without adequate justification. By eliminating these voices and converting any resident representation to mayoral selections, this bill would prevent the Board from performing a key function: rigorous oversight and independent monitoring. Additionally, there is no explanation as to why the “Stabilization and Reform” Board would be more effective than the current Board. During a time when DC residents need more confidence in the leadership at DCHA, this bill would breed further distrust in the agency.

The fact that DCHA is in need of substantial reform does not justify the radical changes proposed through the pending bill, particularly without an adequate opportunity to comment. Further, any effort to rehabilitate DCHA must substantially address the HUD Report’s programmatic concerns, and this bill fails to do that. Notably, HUD found that the current Executive Director “has no experience in property development, property management or managing federal housing programs,” yet this bill does not address current leadership or other staffing concerns. True reform aimed at resolving the fundamental problems at DCHA must also address leadership, internal agency deficiencies, and the grave failings to meet the many needs of DCHA constituents in the provision of safe and affordable housing.

For these reasons, we vehemently oppose the *District of Columbia Housing Authority Stabilization and Reform Emergency Amendment Act of 2022*. DCHA requires thoughtful reform, and we hope the DC Council will join us in opposition to this haphazard and ill-informed legislation. While we certainly agree that there are significant issues that need to be addressed within DCHA and DCHA Board structure, rushed emergency legislation and hurried amendments are *not* the path to meaningful reform for such a critical agency. We are encouraged by the recent introduction of permanent legislation to reform DCHA, and hope DC Council considers it a tangible step forward. Residents and the public deserve thorough

legislation and the opportunity for input. Anything less will be devastating to the lives of DC's most vulnerable residents and the preservation of public housing.

Sincerely,

Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless

Legal Aid of District of Columbia

Bread for the City

Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil  
Rights and Urban Affairs

Legal Counsel for the Elderly

Children's Law Center

Rising for Justice

Empower DC

CC:

The Hon. Kenyan R. McDuffie

The Hon. Anita Bonds

The Hon. Elissa Silverman

The Hon. Robert C. White, Jr.

The Hon. Christina Henderson

The Hon. Brianne K. Nadeau

The Hon. Brooke Pinto

The Hon. Mary M. Cheh

The Hon. Janeese Lewis George

The Hon. Charles Allen

The Hon. Vincent C. Gray

The Hon. Trayon White, Sr.