



March 9th, 2021

Housing Committee and Executive Administration: DHCD Performance Oversight Hearing

Chair Bonds, Housing and Executive Administration Committee members, and staff

Thank you all for allowing me the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Anthony Graham, and I am a resident of the District, and I am here representing the D.C. Association of Realtors and our 3,000 professional members, who work as property managers, title attorneys, and other real estate professionals licensed in DC. DCAR is also a voice for many homeowners, buyers, sellers, renters and housing providers.

DCAR would like to thank Chairperson Bonds and Director Polly Donaldson for their leadership and commitment to increasing housing opportunities for all DC residents. As we slowly navigate our way toward a post-COVID society, it is explicit that housing played a crucial role in protecting health and safety the pandemic. Turning the page to economic recovery-- we maintain that the District's housing climate will be a key indicator of our overall economic vitality.

DCAR understand that the Mayor's Rental Housing Strike Force is working on solutions to aid the battered rental housing economy, and we appreciate Chair Bonds, Director Donaldson, and Housing committee members, for contributing to these badly needed solutions. However, we cannot forget to prioritize homeownership, while we have this broad conversation.

Homeownership gives neighborhoods stability, residents' financial security and the City a steady tax base. Homeowners support local businesses, are likely to be civically engaged and invested in their communities long-term (e.g., ANCs & schools). DCAR urges DHCD to pursue policies that allow more people the opportunity to move into homeownership.

Specifically, we should not move policies that make initial investment in communities cost prohibitive. Such impediments do not foster long-term local community development and neighborhood revitalization.

On the reverse, lower recordation and transfer taxes allow people across the economic spectrum to invest in their communities, as well as provide longevity in the District's savings. We urge support for all initiatives to lower recordation and transfer taxes.

Next, DCAR advocates for continued coordination in and amongst the various government affordable housing programs like TOPA, Inclusionary Zoning and HPAP. Moreover, DCAR is aware of the various Zoning Commission cases involving the expansion of inclusionary zoning tool.

While we are generally supportive of IZ, we learn from DCAR members that the administrative process requires improvements. Additionally, we often hear from various Realtor members that IZ units for sale take a painstakingly long time to fill. Primarily because finding a buyer that meets the criteria is exceedingly rare.

As a trade association driven by member volunteers, DCAR often weighs in on the various rulemaking proposals. Oftentimes, the expertise it takes to understand new regulations can be extremely difficult. We believe communication with the stakeholders actively working in housing is one of the best ways to ensure DC's housing community can actually implement changes.

We value the expertise of the staff charged with that rulemaking and would greatly appreciate any additional outreach they could provide to assist our members' compliance efforts. We could be some of your best advocates when these programs run successfully!

Lastly, we can definitively say that DHCD, OTA, and the Council, especially the Housing Committee, do an excellent job at protecting tenants in the District. Unfortunately, the resources to help small housing providers comply with new sets of rules and regulations are very limited—it's crucial that this is addressed.

When housing providers have access to resources, it translates into higher quality service for tenants. We believe more can be done to assist housing providers, such as additional Ombudsman services and/or community outreach. We welcome hearing from Government Officials on ways our members can better serve the community and are happy to collaborate on these efforts to reach all housing providers, including long-time Washingtonians who only have 1 or 2 properties.

DCAR thanks the Chair Bonds, the Committee on Housing and Executive Administration and DHCD for taking the time to perform such an important review process. We are happy to work together for the benefit of not only our members, but for the general public and real estate community as a whole.