



March 5th, 2021

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 an associate broker and resident of Ward (3?). I am here today representing the D.C. Association of Realtors and our 3,000 professional members. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unparalleled damage to our communities and economy. While the vaccines are slowly equipping us with the tools we need to leave the pandemic behind, many in the District continue to struggle with deep financial and personal loss. We understand that you're all aware the rental housing community has been among those severely impacted. We recognize that the City has taken steps to help address the hardship, including the Mayor's Rental Housing Strike Force, which we want to praise Councilmembers Bonds, Silverman and Pinto for contributing toward solutions.

The public health emergency has created precarious circumstances for tenants and housing providers. We've heard stories from tenants agonizing over whether the pandemic will force them into a situation where they'll lose secure housing for themselves and their loved ones. On the other side, our city's housing providers are anxious too. For example, we've heard from a member, who is a small housing provider, that they are deeply concerned about losing the duplex they inherited. They simply can't keep up on the myriad of associated payments and feel pushed to sell. It's clear that both parties are suffering right now.

Today we're focusing on the Office of the Tenant Advocate's mission—whose mission is to advocate for the rights and interests of District renters. Throughout the declared public health emergency, the City, including the Council, has taken measures to protect vulnerable tenants—like the Eviction Notice Moratorium. To be clear, we fully appreciate the intention behind the moratorium, which is keeping families housed to reduce community spread. However, achieving this goal has brought about many unintended, negative consequences on housing providers and tenants. There are reckless, unlawful tenants who are posing a health and safety threat to their fellow residents. We learn of violent incidents frequently from our members who own or manage properties. Altercations where we've heard of a dangerous tenant pouring

bleach on a resident; or incidents like this, where sadly, an individual fires a gun inside a community then that bullet ricochets and hits someone.

Tenants and housing providers shouldn't feel unsafe in their housing communities and left without recourse. We have to allow for cases like these to be the exception under the public health emergency; it protects tenants and housing providers. Furthermore, in uncertain situations like these, tenants have the Office of the Tenant Advocate to turn to for resources and counsel.

We can definitively say that OTA and the Council, especially the Housing Committee, do an excellent job at protecting tenants in the District. Unfortunately, the resources to help housing providers can certainly be better. We know that when housing providers are equipped with tools and resources, that translates into higher quality service for tenants. Again, providers and tenants are suffering right now. Strides have been made to rescue tenants. We simply believe that more can be done in the short and long term to assist housing providers. I greatly appreciate you, Chair Bonds, the housing committee, for your continued leadership, and for allowing us the opportunity to speak. The D.C. Association of Realtors is always willing to partner with City on housing issues that are affecting our city. Thank you.