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Special Hearing on COVID Protections

Public Hearing

May 21, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Gray, Co-Chair Allen, committee members, and staff. Thank you all for allowing me the opportunity to speak. My name is Anthony Graham, I am a member of the D.C. Association of Realtors--DCAR— and I also represent small housing providers in the District.

DCAR and our 3,000 members are a voice for real estate professionals, small housing providers, homeowners, and renters who live and work in the District.

The hearing today is meant to play an instrumental role in forging a path forward without the various moratoria in place. DCAR fully understands that lifting the safeguards provided under the public health emergency can stir anxiety.

Thankfully, the District has the resources available to help residents address fundamental concerns surrounding housing and utilities. STAY DC is an immensely valuable resource for our city's tenants and housing providers that will help us shift back to normal.

Informing the rental housing community of this resource is going to be pivotal in minimizing adverse effects throughout the shift. The other piece is ensuring that the STAY DC program is fully operational and that major kinks are smoothed over.

DCAR commends Mayor Bowser's Administration, including Director Polly Donaldson, for quickly addressing start-up issues and dedicating 100 staff members to answering STAY DC case concerns, who can also serve district residents in a number of languages.

It is DCAR's understanding that payments to tenants and housing providers have begun. A crucial step in this process is community outreach and education to make certain these funds are obligated. If we do not have at \$130 million of the total \$350 million out the door by September, then we risk losing the money back to the federal government.

Chairman Mendelson proposed an amendment to the eviction moratorium that would have allowed housing providers to file for notice if a tenant, after a maximum of 75-days, has not done their part to participate in STAY DC.

DCAR members supported Chairman Mendelson's effort because it is consequential that these funds are out the door, and ultimately housing providers must have access to the courts if tenants do not pay rent owed. DCAR believed the 75-day timeframe provided enough time, but we understand that there were concerns surrounding STAY DC's functionality and public outreach.

September is four months away. We implore the District to use implement a plan and utilize resources to inform the public about the STAY DC resource. DCAR is also using its communication channels to provide relevant information to the rental housing community.

To conclude, as always, thank you Chair Gray, Co-Chair Allen and Committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony. We look forward to working with you all to ensure that tenants and small housing providers have an equitable end to the public health emergency guardrails.