

**Council of the District of Columbia
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC RECOVERY
NOTICE OF PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004**

**COUNCILMEMBER CHARLES ALLEN, CO-CHAIRPERSON
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC RECOVERY**

AND

**COUNCILMEMBER VINCENT C. GRAY, CO-CHAIRPERSON
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC RECOVERY**

ANNOUNCE A PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING ON

**AN EQUITABLE END TO SAFETY NET PROTECTIONS PUT IN PLACE DURING THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**FRIDAY, MAY 21, 2021, 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM
REMOTE OVERSIGHT HEARING VIA ZOOM
BROADCAST LIVE ON DC COUNCIL CHANNEL 13
STREAMED LIVE AT WWW.DCCOUNCIL.US AND ENTERTAINMENT.DC.GOV.**

On Friday, May 21, 2021, Councilmembers Charles Allen and Vincent C. Gray, Co-Chairpersons of the Special Committee on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery will convene a joint public oversight hearing on “An Equitable End to Safety Net Protections Put in Place During the COVID-19 Pandemic.” The hearing will be held virtually at 9:00 a.m. via the Zoom platform.

On March 11, 2020, Mayor Muriel Bowser declared a public health emergency due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Shortly thereafter, on March 17, 2020, the Council passed the COVID-19 Response Emergency Amendment Act of 2020, enacted on March 17, 2020 (D.C. Act 23-247, 67 DCR 3093) (“first COVID emergency measure”). Section 308 of the first COVID emergency measure included a prohibition on evictions during a public health emergency, and subsequent emergency and temporary legislation clarified the scope of that eviction prohibition—ensuring that District residents would be able to stay in stable housing during the public health emergency, and 60 days after. The first COVID emergency measure also included provisions prohibiting utilities from shutting off electric, gas, and water service during the pandemic. Researchers have shown that moratoria on evictions and utility shutoffs have saved lives by reducing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. One study found that if all states had adopted moratoria similar to the District’s, COVID-19-related deaths could have been reduced by as much as 40%. However, pursuant to the Council’s most recent extension, these moratoria likely will expire by the end of the summer. At that point, tenants, including those who lost all or some of their income due to the pandemic, will have fewer protections against eviction. The Mayor has provided some grant programs for landlords and tenants, and Congress has authorized additional

grants as well. However, before the end of the moratoria the District will need to have in place a plan to deal with the massive amount of unpaid back rent—which some estimate at between \$13 and \$52 billion nationwide—to prevent mass evictions. For tenants, the District needs to provide some assurance that large numbers of residents are not displaced from their homes. At the same time, the District must ensure that landlords, in particular small landlords, can afford to maintain the District rental housing stock in safe conditions.

Researchers have found strong evidence linking communities with greater percentages of poor housing conditions with higher incidences of COVID-19. This underscores what we've known for a long time: Poor housing conditions are associated with many poor health conditions, including respiratory infections, asthma, lead poisoning, injuries, and mental health disorders. The Council has acknowledged the need to improve public housing conditions after years of federal underfunding and neglected maintenance that left many District public housing residents living in substandard conditions with lead, mold, and other hazards. Last year, the Council appropriated \$50 million in Fiscal Year 2021 and \$15 million in Fiscal Year 2022 for repairs to public housing units. Poor housing conditions are not limited to District owned public housing. In 2018, the Office of the Attorney General, on behalf of residents, sued the landlords of six District apartment buildings for poor health and safety conditions. More than 800 units were in Wards 7 and 8. Residents in Wards 7 and 8 experienced greater numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths compared to other wards, which only underscores the need to ensure that those residents have access to quality, affordable housing after the pandemic. The Special Committee plans to explore how to ensure that as the evictions moratorium ends, residents can remain in stable, quality housing.

In addition to these protections for tenants, the first COVID emergency measure, and the Council's and Mayor's subsequent actions, provided many additional safety net protections for District residents. The Council required mortgage lenders to work with homeowners who lost income due to the public health emergency to set up payment plans. The Council authorized the Mayor to extend public benefits, like the D.C. Healthcare Alliance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, that otherwise may have expired during the pandemic. The District and federal government provided direct cash payments to some residents, including a District-funded program to provide payments to those who were not eligible for federal stimulus payments, especially residents without immigration documents. In coordination with the federal government the Council expanded unemployment benefits—providing benefits for classes of workers, like gig workers and the self-employed, who are not eligible for unemployment benefits under normal circumstances, as well as expanding the length of time that claimants can continue to collect unemployment benefits and increasing the amount of the benefits. While it is possible that some of these reforms will last beyond the pandemic, generally, these additional cash transfers will end. Recently, the Department of Employment Services made changes to the unemployment benefits system that has caused interruptions to benefits for many residents, giving us a preview of what could happen as these extended benefits programs begin to wind down. Some residents who have not received unemployment benefits they are due—in some cases, for several weeks—are in danger of running out of money to pay rent or purchase food.

There is no question that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted Black and Brown residents in the District. Infection and death rates have been higher than those for white residents.

Vaccination rates have been lower compared to the rates of white residents. Unemployment, under-employment, and poverty rates for Black and Brown residents were higher than for white residents even before the pandemic, and those disparities have only increased during the pandemic. Black and Brown residents will be disproportionately impacted by the end of the eviction and utility shutoff moratoria and the additional public benefits that have kept many residents alive during the pandemic. Neighborhoods with higher percentages of poor housing conditions, which are more proliferate in Black and Brown communities, had higher incidents of poor health and chronic health conditions that made individuals and families more vulnerable to COVID-19.

The purpose of this hearing will be to focus on the impact of the end of the many safety net programs that have been put in place during the pandemic and to explore how the District can recover from the pandemic in a way that ensures the health and safety of all residents, but in particular the Black and Brown residents who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This will include exploring what targeted policies are needed to mitigate adverse health outcomes associated with poor housing conditions. The Special Committee on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery has been charged with delivering a report on recovery, which must include recommendations to ensure equitable supports as the District's economy recovers.

During the hearing, the Special Committee will hear testimony from invited witnesses and the public. Oral testimony from public witnesses will be strictly limited to three minutes to allow everyone an opportunity to testify. Persons wishing to provide oral testimony on May 21st should contact Malcolm Cameron, Legislative Analyst of the Committee on Health by e-mail at mcameron@dccouncil.us or by phone at (202) 341-4425 before 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 19, 2021. When sending an e-mail or leaving a voicemail, please provide Mr. Cameron with the following information:

- Your first and last name;
- The name of the organization you are representing (if any);
- Your title with the organization;
- Your e-mail address; and
- Your phone number.

Mr. Cameron will e-mail a confirmation of your attendance with an agenda, witness list, and attached instructions for accessing the hearing on the evening of May 20th. Additional witnesses may provide written statements to the Special Committee, which will be made part of the official record. Public witnesses at the hearing should limit their oral testimony to 3 minutes. The Special Committee encourages witnesses to submit a copy of any written testimony electronically in advance to mcameron@dccouncil.us.

For accommodation requests, including spoken language or sign language interpretation, please inform the Special Committee of the need as soon as possible but no later than five (5) business days before the proceeding. The Council will make every effort to fulfill timely requests, however requests received in less than five (5) business days may not be fulfilled and alternatives may be offered.

Persons wishing to provide written testimony should e-mail their written testimony to Malcolm Cameron, Legislative Analyst of the Committee on Health at mcameron@dccouncil.us before 6:00 p.m. on Friday, June 4, 2021. Please indicate that you are submitting testimony for this hearing in the subject line of the e-mail.