GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
REAL PROPERTY TAX APPEALS COMMISSION

Written Testimony of Gizachew Andargeh

for the Committee on Housing and Executive Administration

Fiscal Year 2022 Performance Oversight Hearing on

The Real Property Tax Appeals Commission

Monday, January 10, 2022

Good morning, Chairperson Bonds and Members of the Committee. I am Gizachew Andargeh, Executive Director of the Real Property Tax Appeals Commission also known as RPTAC. I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the performance of the Real Property Tax Appeals Commission for Fiscal Year/Tax Year 2021.

For Tax Year 2021 (season ended August 18, 2021), the Commission received a total of 7,341 cases – 5,866 were Class 1 Residential valuation cases and 1,475 were Class 2 Commercial valuation cases (including Mixed Use). There were 3 classification cases and 46 Homestead cases. This caseload was higher than Tax Year 2020 by 1,512 cases. Of the 7,341 TY 2021 valuation cases we received, 1,712 were resolved with Stipulation Agreements and 60 were withdrawn, leaving 5,569 TY 2021 cases that the Commission decided.

As most have experienced in 2021, COVID directly impacted the Commission's work. RPTAC has made adjustments to better engage our petitioners, staff, and Commissioners in order to ensure that needs are met. I am happy to report that we have seen an increase in the number of property owners who are taking advantage of the convenience of filing electronically, demonstrating the importance of this investment in time and tasks. In TY 2018 there were 4,065 cases filed electronically; in TY2019 there were 4,210 cases filed electronically; and in TY20 5,140 cases were files electronically. Every year the Commission is seeing an increase in electronic filings and TY 2021 was no different. Last year 7,042 cases were filed electronically: 96% of all cases filed with the Commission. In addition, some technology-based process improvements were made to increase efficiency, while most Commissioners and some staff worked from home to comply with pandemic protocols and ensure safety. Specifically, each Commissioner uses WebEx to virtually sit for hearings and Adobe to electronically sign their decisions. These enhanced efficiencies are vital at a time when there is an increasing demand for our services, and we are required to innovatively pivot during the pandemic.

Tax Year 2021 concluded with 74% of cases completed by the annual February 1 deadline. This is lower than previous years and was due to the significant increase in cases and the fact that there was not a full slate of full-time commissioners during the appeals season. As the Committee is aware, last year RPTAC did not have a Chairperson and one full-time commissioner was away on extended leave. One major change occurred last season which took effect in Fiscal Year 2022: the amendment of RPTAC's establishing statute to increase operational efficiency and come into compliance with federal law. Specifically, the Chairperson eligibility criteria was expanded to source from a broader candidate pool, and part-time commissioners were converted from contractors to direct hires as full-time temporary Hearing Examiners. The expanded Chairperson eligibility criteria allowed for new candidates to be considered for the role of Chairperson. RPTAC and the Mayor's Office of Talent and

Appointments acted quickly to solicit and nominate a new Chairperson who has begun his duties as of November 3, 2021 after a swift Council confirmation process. The second addressed conflicting language and put the Commission in compliance with Federal tax law eliminating penalties the Commission has been obliged to pay. In addition, having Hearing Examiners who are committed to RPTAC's mission as full-time employees during the appeals season helps address some of the challenges from TY 2021 in Tax Year 2022, namely an increasing caseload.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you. I will take any questions that you or the Committee may have at this time.