



**Brenda Donald, Executive Director**

## **Performance Oversight Hearing Brenda Donald Testimony**

Thank you and good afternoon, Chairpersons Bonds and Nadeau and to your committee colleagues. My name is Brenda Donald and I am the executive director of the District of Columbia Housing Authority. With me today are Chief Operating Officer Rachel Joseph, Deputy Executive Director Victor Martinez, and our Police Chief Joel Maupin.

It has been an honor to serve this agency's customers since I took the helm eight months ago. It is not a commitment I take lightly. Our agency has its share of challenges. Stepping up now has never been more important, and my team knows we have an obligation to get it right for the people we serve.

This is why I signed on – to make the DC Housing Authority work for the people who need it the most. Our mission is to provide quality affordable housing to extremely low through moderate income households, foster sustainable communities, and cultivate opportunities for residents to improve their lives.

As the largest landlord in the city, we know DCHA is a critical part of the District's affordable housing agenda. That includes more than 4,500 households in our traditional public housing, over 11,000 households in the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program, and more than 12,000 households in locally administered programs, including the Local Rent Supplement Program.

### **[SLIDE 1 – Overview of the Portfolio]**

This slide shows a little more detail about our public housing portfolio.

### **[SLIDE 2 – Who Lives in DC Public Housing]**

And this slide gives an overview of an average resident of public housing.

Since June, I have gone on countless property tours, met with residents in-person, established monthly meetings with resident council presidents, attended standing meetings with the advocates, and been a guest speaker at local landlord association meetings. I have also focused on our staff with regular all-staff meetings and establishment of a labor-management partnership council. I've even planted flowers in DCHA communities,

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done some painting, and personally delivered Thanksgiving meals to residents as part of the agency's new, quarterly Day of Service program.

It is clear to me that identifying solutions will require an executive-level focus on accountability and a data-driven approach to problem solving as we collaborate across the agency to analyze and identify priorities.

Over the last eight months, I have assembled a stellar leadership team with the skills, experience, and passion to transform this agency. DCHA's executive team consists of internal talent, national public housing expertise, and proven leaders from other disciplines. I think we have one of the strongest teams in the country.

And thank you, Chairperson Bonds, for your leadership in helping to strengthen the capacity of our Board of Commissioners. Your Budget Support Act language required us to add two members with housing, finance, or real estate experience, one chosen by the Council and one by the Mayor. Hats off to you for leading the way with your excellent choice of Raymond Skinner. And Mayor Bowser has filled two critical vacancies on the Board with real estate finance expert Melissa Lee and our housing choice voucher representative Ronnie Harris, who bought her own home through the DCHA Home Ownership Assistance Program. I know that the Mayor is vetting candidates to fill the final remaining seat on the Board. And in spite of a rocky start with our Resident Commissioner elections, the process is underway and it will soon be completed soon.

As director, my number one charge is to increase public housing occupancy rates. The agency is currently focusing on filling current vacancies and adding "make-ready" units through aggressive renovation and lease-up strategies. A key strategy is to thaw out our long-frozen waitlist to match as many people as possible with available housing, in addition to meeting the needs of people who need reasonable accommodations.

Also, we are currently conducting a thorough analysis of our rent payments and collections. We will implement a new rent reasonableness tool to administer rents that make leasing to our voucher participants an attractive prospect for landlords while also reflecting fair market rent standards that give tenants choices about where they live.

### **[SLIDE 3 Local Funding]**

Now I will turn to the main focus of Council Oversight – to report on how we spent the local funds allocated to us. There are three main areas of local funding to DCHA: our capital program, public safety, and the many local programs we administer for DC residents, including the Local Rent Supplement Program.

### **[SLIDE 4 FY 21 Capital Spending Update]**

In terms of our capital program, the District invested \$50 million in FY21, as you can see on this slide. We used \$728,000 for architectural and engineering studies. The largest portion, \$15.4 million, went to property stabilization. Another \$12.6 million was spent on capital replacement and \$7.7 million helped us get closer to completion on our lead abatement plan. Finally, we spent \$13.4 million on our occupancy plan, turning those make ready units. While we had a slow start, I am proud to report that nearly all of the funds were obligated in FY21, and all of these projects will be completed this Spring. These projects include making units ready for move in, elevator modernizations at our senior prop-

erties, urgent repairs, environmental abatement of lead and asbestos, replacement of aging equipment, and more.

The District provides \$4.2 million or nearly half of our public safety budget. Our officers, who have the same legal authority as Metropolitan Police Department officers, often work together with MPD to combat crime in and around DCHA's communities.

Our force is currently 134 members strong and consists of sworn officers and officials, special police officers, security officers, and administrative staff.

### **[SLIDE 5 Public Safety]**

As you can see on the slide, DCHA's communities have seen reductions in reported violent and property crime as compared to the city's crime rates. At the 10 properties that are part of the Office of the Attorney General's settlement agreement, DCHA reported violent and property crimes were reduced by 32% compared to the previous year. Throughout our portfolio, we have seen a 25% reduction in DCHA reported violent crimes, compared to the previous year.

These lower rates were achieved through community policing, using technology to better pinpoint troubled areas, and other best practices. In 2021, DCHA officers issued 402 bar notices, made 322 arrests on or near our properties, and sent 41 fight back referrals. Their work took 24 guns, 191 rounds of ammo, a bullet proof vest, 32 stolen vehicles, and countless quantities of illicit substances, among other illegal items, off DC streets.

### **[SLIDE 6 DCHA's Local Funding]**

We've spent more than \$227.8 million in local funding for FY21. Turning now to our locally funded voucher programs, the largest with \$124.7 million in funding is the Local Rent Supplement Program. Some 1,622 LRSP vouchers were issued by the District in FY21, including more than 80 new LRSP project-based units.

Our DC Local voucher program, which pre-dates LRSP, was the first voucher program the city created to benefit D.C. residents in need. The \$8.7 million allocation supports more than 420 households in FY21 and FY22, to date.

In addition to our voucher programs, these funds help our sister agencies provide permanent supportive housing and targeted affordable housing. This includes people from our waitlist, youth aging out of foster care, family reunification, and people with mental health challenges. It also relieves some of the housing pressures for returning citizens, the LGBTQ community, and our seniors.

The funding administered for these programs served 30 youth aging out of foster care, nearly 3,500 families in rapid rehousing, about 60 seniors in the SHALLOW program, and some 1,550 people in need of housing assistance in FY21.

### **TRANSITION to Customer Enrichment and Close**

### **[SLIDE 7 Customer Enrichment]**

In closing, it will take focus, discipline, and grace to meet the needs of the people we serve, and our hardworking staff is the most important ingredient in this plan. Our employees take great pride working to assist our customers in achieving goals to enhance their lives and the lives of their families. Please take a look at a few of the accomplishments our DCHA family achieved in the past year.

**[Time to review a few slides 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 Customer Enrichment]**

Thank you for your time. We look forward to answering your questions.

**[SLIDE 14 Questions]**