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**Testimony of Simon Wentzell  
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**Before the Committee on Housing  
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Performance Oversight Hearing Regarding the Department of Housing and  
Community Development and the DC Housing Finance Agency**

**March 5, 2026**

Legal Aid<sup>1</sup> submits the following testimony regarding the performance of the Department of Housing and Community Development (“DHCD”). My testimony today will focus on how greater accessibility, transparency, and accountability is needed at DHCD. DHCD can do so by:

1. Increasing Accessibility of the Rent Registry Database;
2. Improving Transparency in the Allocation of Federal and Local Funding; and
3. Ensuring Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (“TOPA”) Tenant Support Providers are Accountable.

**The Rent Registry Database Lacks Accessibility**

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<sup>1</sup> Legal Aid DC is the oldest and largest general civil legal services program in the District of Columbia. The largest part of our work is comprised of individual representation in housing, domestic violence/family, public benefits, and consumer law. We also work on immigration law matters and help individuals with the collateral consequences of their involvement with the criminal legal system. From the experiences of our clients, we identify opportunities for court and law reform, public policy advocacy, and systemic litigation. For more information, visit [www.LegalAidDC.org](http://www.LegalAidDC.org).

On June 2, 2025, the Rental Accommodations Division (“RAD”) launched the Rent Registry database.<sup>2</sup> The Council required first RAD and then OTA to develop a user-friendly database of rental housing in the District over a decade ago.<sup>3</sup> This is information that has long been collected by RAD but has been kept on paper forms that have to be individually pulled up and manually searched through.<sup>4</sup> With no easy way to look through this information, tenants have been effectively kept in the dark about rental units across the District.

The Council required this database to provide “information relevant to tenants seeking and living in rent-controlled accommodations”<sup>5</sup> by allowing tenants to search for units by rent, number of bedrooms, and provided services, among other parameters.<sup>6</sup> This information would let tenants have a convenient way to find affordable housing in the district. The database is also required to provide name and contact information for the owner and property manager of a housing provider, business license information, and information on outstanding housing code violations. This information allows tenants and tenant advocates to hold disreputable housing providers accountable.<sup>7</sup>

While Rent Registry is meant to allow tenants access to information, it is falling short. First, Rent Registry is not easily accessible on DHCD’s website. There are no links to it under pages for Housing Locator or Records Search.<sup>8</sup> Second, at launch the Housing Provider and Tenant Portal were operational but the Reporting Portal did not become

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<sup>2</sup> DHCD, Rent Registry, <https://rentregistry.dc.gov/>  
[https://dhcd.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhcd/page\\_content/attachments/2025-04-02%20RentRegistry%20Demonstration%20Powerpoint%20Slides.pdf](https://dhcd.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhcd/page_content/attachments/2025-04-02%20RentRegistry%20Demonstration%20Powerpoint%20Slides.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Support Act of 2015,  
<https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/laws/21-36>

<sup>4</sup> DHCD, Public Records, <https://www.dhcdrecords.org/DHCDnavigator/>

<sup>5</sup> D.C. Code § 42–3502.03c(b)(2)

<sup>6</sup> D.C. Code § 42–3502.03c(c)

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> DHCD, Housing Locator Services, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/page/housing-locator-services>;  
DHCD, Search Rent Control Records Online, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/service/search-rent-control-records-online>

available until late January 2026, and only the Prospective and/or Current Tenant tab is functional.<sup>9</sup> That tab is designed to let tenants conduct the searches described above.<sup>10</sup> However, the available data is clearly incomplete. Only two dozen multi-family properties are listed, a small fraction of the total number of multi-family properties in the District.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, none of the other public data sets are available.

There are serious equity concerns as well. First, none of these portals have non-English versions. This means that any tenant with limited or no English proficiency will have to use a translation tool to use the database. Second, the Rental Housing Act has a lower cap on rent increases for units occupied by tenants who are elderly or who live with a disability. Previously, tenants needed to submit a paper form to RAD to certify that protected status.<sup>12</sup> Now, tenants are required to submit this information online via the Tenant Portal.<sup>13</sup> To do so, the tenant must have an email address.<sup>14</sup> Not all tenants, especially elderly tenants or tenants with a disability, have an email address, let alone access to a device to submit this information. To their credit, RAD is trying to minimize this burden by allowing tenants to come in person to the Housing Resource Center.<sup>15</sup> But if left unaddressed, these barriers will prevent our most vulnerable residents from being able to access this important tool.

RAD needs to continue to improve Rent Registry. We ask that they explain why not all of the required data is available and provide a timeline for when the missing information and functions will be online. RAD also needs to create versions of the database in the most

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<sup>9</sup> DHCD, Welcome Public Users, <https://rentregistry.dc.gov/welcome-public-users/>

<sup>10</sup> DHCD, Public Portal, <https://rentregistry.dc.gov/public-portal/>

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> DHCD, Rent Control, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/rentcontrol>

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> DHCD, “User Guide Tenant Portal,” pg. 5, [https://dhcd.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhcd/page\\_content/attachments/User%20Guide%20Tenant%20Portal%20%28UAT%202024-11-14%29.pdf](https://dhcd.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhcd/page_content/attachments/User%20Guide%20Tenant%20Portal%20%28UAT%202024-11-14%29.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> DHCD, Housing Resource Center, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/service/housing-resource-center>

common non-English languages of the District’s tenants, like Spanish, French, and Amharic.<sup>16</sup> Rent Registry has a lot of promise, but there is still much to be done.

### **Greater Transparency on Housing Funds**

DHCD plays a critical role in creating and preserving affordable housing by administering hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding.<sup>17</sup> In determining where this funding goes, DHCD seeks input from the public. However, the public is unable to provide meaningful input due to DHCD’s poor record of publishing important documents.

#### Transparency in Federal Funding

Federal funding for DHCD comes from HUD grants and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (“LIHTC”). While there are certain federal requirements for how this funding is used, the District, through DHCD, has wide latitude in choosing where that money is spent. Those choices are then published in the Annual Action Plan (“AAP”)<sup>18</sup> and the LIHTC Qualified Allocation Plan (“QAP”).<sup>19</sup> The AAP lays out the District’s plans for how various HUD grants will be used in the coming year. Through the QAP, DHCD lays out what metrics are used when determining what projects receive LIHTC funds. DHCD seeks input from the public when deciding where and how to allocate the related federal funds, such as what levels of affordability to offer or which locations should be prioritized.

The AAP and QAP are complex documents which clearly require a great deal of effort by DHCD staff. However, the public can only provide meaningful input on these documents if DHCD makes them available. Currently, the most recent version of the AAP on DHCD’s website is from 2023.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the most recent QAP (which was published in

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<sup>16</sup> DC Data Analysis & Visualization, Language Access Facilitation, <https://opdatahub.dc.gov/pages/language-access>

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD Exchange, About Grantees, Washington, DC, <https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/washington-dc>

<sup>18</sup> DHCD, Annual Action Plan, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/page/annual-action-plan>

<sup>19</sup> DHCD, Tax Credit Allocation, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/service/tax-credit-allocation>

<sup>20</sup> DHCD, Annual Action Plan, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/page/annual-action-plan>

December 2025) is not published alongside prior versions.<sup>21</sup> Both Maryland and Virginia show that it is possible to make the AAP and QAP process transparent. For example, Maryland has a webpage dedicated to the proposed changes in their most recent QAP which shows clean and blackline versions of their proposed QAP for 2026.<sup>22</sup>

If the District wants to ensure all voices are heard, DHCD needs to improve its transparency in how it administers funding on our behalf.

### Transparency in Housing Production Trust Fund

The Housing Production Trust Fund (“HPTF”) is the District’s major tool to produce and preserve affordable housing with local funds.<sup>23</sup> However, the HPTF lacks transparency and accountability, in part due to the lack of availability of updated reports. For example, the most recent Annual Report available on DHCD’s website is from 2023.<sup>24</sup> This lack of transparency means the public can’t know whether HPTF funds are mainly being used for production of new housing or preserving the District’s aging stock of affordable housing. Without this knowledge, the public cannot provide meaningful input on where this funding should be used.

We are encouraged by the Housing Production Omnibus Amendment Act of 2026, introduced by Chair White and Councilmembers Nadeau, Lewis George, and Allen.<sup>25</sup> Some of the bill’s strongest provisions include clear dedicated allocations for the different uses of HPTF funds. We are also encouraged by the inclusion of a tenant representative on the Board who can provide unique insight when allocating this funding.

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<sup>21</sup> DHCD, Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/page/low-income-housing-tax-credit-lihtc-program>

<sup>22</sup> Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, 2026 Revision to the Qualified Allocation Plan and Multifamily Rental Financing Program Guide, <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/HousingDevelopment/Pages/QAPGuideRevisions.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> DHCD, Housing Production Trust Fund, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/page/housing-production-trust-fund>

<sup>24</sup> DHCD, Housing Production Trust Fund Reports, <https://dhcd.dc.gov/page/housing-production-trust-fund-reports>

<sup>25</sup> Housing Production Omnibus Amendment Act of 2026, <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/B26-0597>

We look forward to working with the Council to further strengthen the bill and ensure that it meets the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community.

### **TOPA Tenant Support Providers Should Only be Experienced Community Based Organizations**

Finally, DHCD’s Rental Conversion and Sale Division (“RCSD”) administers TOPA. TOPA is an incredibly important law that was enacted to empower tenants in DC. It is also complex and requires significant technical expertise to navigate the various steps in deadlines. To reduce the pressure of this complexity, TOPA was amended to include a “cooling off” period that prohibits tenant associations from assigning their rights in the first 45 days.<sup>26</sup> This period allows tenants to get organized and educated before assigning their rights. However, this cooling off period is waived if a tenant association works with a certified tenant support provider.<sup>27</sup>

Many fantastic community based organizations (“CBOs”) like Housing Counselling Services, EMPOWER, and others have experience organizing tenants when their building has been up for sale. They have the skills and expertise to shepherd tenants through the TOPA process. Conversely, there are unscrupulous individuals and entities which hold themselves out as tenant advocates or TOPA experts who work on the proposed buyer’s behalf. They approach tenants who are early in the process and pressure them into giving up this valuable tool for next to nothing. The ongoing activities of bad actors posing as tenant advocates is why we encourage RCSD to be diligent and conscientious when certifying tenant support providers. The District is home to vetted CBOs who have established themselves as true supporters of tenants and their rights. We hope that only those organizations and others like them will get this important stamp of approval from DHCD.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for this opportunity to testify about how DHCD, HPTF, and this Committee can preserve affordable communities for DC residents with low and moderate incomes, and we look forward to working with all parties on the path forward.

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<sup>26</sup> D.C. Code § 42-3404.03b

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*