



www.legalaiddc.org
1331 H Street, NW
Suite 350
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 628-1161

**Testimony of Omar Hashem
Senior Investigator, Housing Law Unit
Legal Aid DC**

**Before the Committee on Housing
Council of the District of Columbia**

Public Hearing Roundtable Regarding:

**“Improving Housing Conditions and Strengthening Landlord Accountability in the
District”**

October 1, 2026

Legal Aid DC¹ submits the following testimony regarding the improvement of housing conditions and strengthening of landlord accountability in the District.

As a Senior Housing Investigator, I have done over 300 home inspections in my time with Legal Aid DC. Each inspection represents a resident in our District. I feel privileged to be invited into people’s homes to witness firsthand the conditions some of our residents are forced to live with. Conditions such as warped wood from repeated flooding, soaked carpets from sewage, mold covering walls from floor to ceiling, rodents eating through children’s toys, and a family with a newborn baby huddled around a heater during DC’s coldest winter in the past decade. In that home, the building’s heat was out for three weeks. The family’s landlord told them it would take another month for the necessary part to come in to fix the heating.

¹ 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.

It is important to acknowledge that tenants are the ones living with these severe problems on a daily basis. The people we are helping, often, are seeking help for more than themselves. They represent their families. Other actors, like Legal Aid and Department of Buildings (DOB), or members of this Council, only see a small pocket of a tenant's life. But the harm tenants and their families experience because of poor housing conditions affects their entire life. Our goal should be to stop this continued harm at the earliest point of intervention, and ensure the problem is truly fixed.

We Must Have More Tenant Involvement in the DOB Abatement Process

For the tenant, the process feels like it begins and ends with reporting an infraction. The tenant then has no further involvement, information, or timeline as to when the harm they are experiencing will end. Tenants are consistently not getting the DOB report after it is complete, not getting notified that a landlord has gotten a notice of infraction, and not getting notified if a landlord claims the problem has been abated. Tenants should not only have access to the steps in the process, but they must also be able to verify measures have been taken. Currently, there is no way a tenant can contest that proper work has been completed. The only solution DOB offers is for a tenant to open another ticket and restart the entire process, where they are again, left in the dark. This runaround is cruel for the tenant and their family, where more time dealing with the issues equals more harm they experience. Communication is how we instill faith in our systems.

The system works when the people involved engage in good faith. Bad actor landlords can and will game the system which means tenants continue to suffer under unlivable housing conditions for a long time, which creates a financial drain on all institutions involved. It is critical that we give our city the tools and resources it needs to intervene when these bad actors cannot or will not make repairs of serious conditions.

This is why Legal Aid DC is in strong support of the STRONG Homes Amendment Act. By passing the STRONG Act and adding some amendments to give tenants more voice in the receivership process, Council can move in the right direction by creating mechanisms for the District to intervene when negligent or malicious owners refuse to.

Identifying a Natural Person Behind LLC's is Essential for Systemic Change

Passing a bill that would require identifying natural persons who financially benefit from an LLC would help prevent bad actor landlords from maliciously shielding themselves from consequences through LLCs. Without this requirement, the District allows for an environment where bad actors like Sam Razjooyan thrive. Sam Razjooyan was able to

acquire over 70 properties and accumulated over 4,000 housing code violations over 10 years.²

He is merely one of the few that was caught; more landlords like him are operating in the District. Council must take measures to identify others who are currently gaming the system through LLCs and to prevent future predators.

Conclusion

While Legal Aid appreciates the steps being taken, we must remember loopholes are still available to landlords. The longer the Council and DC agencies take to resolve these issues, the more harm it does to residents of our city.

² Attorney General Schwalb Files RICO Lawsuit to Dismantle Razjooyan Slumlord Empire, <https://oag.dc.gov/release/attorney-general-schwalb-files-rico-lawsuit>