

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE – WARD THREE – ISSUES AND RESPONSES

(You can write and edit the questionnaire in Word; please feel free to do so and use as much space as you would like.)

RECKLESS VOUCHER TENANTS PLACEMENT IS AN IRRESPONSIBLE POLICY

Ward Three tenants have been confronted with a sticky situation. Some voucher recipients who are unready and unprepared for community living are being placed in rent control building without screening beforehand. This policy is causing major safety issues and seriously disrupting the peace of rental communities. Some regular renters and even other voucher tenants have relocated for their safety. Some observers attempt to minimize the problem, claiming that the alarm and concerned reactions of tenants are racist and NIMBY; but tenants in these building overwhelmingly welcome voucher residents, and often say they are good additions to their buildings. However, some voucher holders are in need of “permanent supportive housing” instead. The policy of placing voucher holders who are in need of independent supportive housing in regular rent control buildings (not equipped to provide support or even willing to contact social services when need or emergency arise) is unwise, if not harmful to all tenants – regular voucher tenants, regular rent control tenants, and tenants in need of special social services.

Worse, voucher holders not ready for independent living need “wrap around” social services. Being placed recklessly or intentionally in rent control buildings without the special support services these tenants need has had dangerous results. Lack of wrap around services has made these tenants a harm to themselves and their neighbors. Other tenants, even other voucher tenants, have to relocate for their safety. Remaining tenants are outraged as this policy is disrupting and destroying once peaceful communities that have become the scene of drug usage, drug dealing, verbal and physical threats, violence, harm and constant police and emergency services response.

Some advocates believe these special needs voucher tenants are being directed on-purpose at rent controlled buildings. There does seem evidence that the policy is an intentional effort to destroy rent control in order to significantly further pad the pockets of landlords.

1. Would you support hearings on this policy to help find a solution for this policy that places voucher recipients in regular rent control, who instead need social services, halfway houses and mental health housing (called CRFs or centrally run facilities)?

Absolutely. This is a serious issue that must be addressed. In doing so, there will be real risks that the messenger – whoever raises issues – will be caricatured as xenophobic or exclusionary. I believe I am best suited to try to address the issues around these programs without falling into that trap given my work with the affordable housing and homeless advocacy communities in Ward 3 and around the city.

See <https://fruminforward3.com/housing-voucher-programs/>

2. Would you support as one possible solution, that screening be required for voucher recipients to discern whether they should be placed in social service housing or are ready for independent living?

We must explore such an option. As noted in the summary, placing a person who is not in a position to manage their affairs in an independent living setting can be a disservice to that person and others living in proximity to them. We need to provide residents with housing options that meet their needs and maximize their ability to get on their feet and thrive. "Housing first" implies something follows, in this case, wraparound services. We need to make sure new residents who need services receive the services they need and those who need even more help than can be provided in an independent living context get what they need to succeed.

3. Would you commit to funding the vastly underfunded housing needed by special needs tenants: halfway houses, centrally run facilities operated by behavioral health providers, and the like?

Yes. Again, we need to meet the needs of our residents and that will require a spectrum of housing options. My wife loves an old Bazooka Joe comic where Joe is looking for something he lost under a street light and someone asks if that is where he lost the item and he says "no but it is where there is light." We should not simply try to house people where we

may be able to find a place for them, but rather find places that meet their needs. The Brooks on Idaho Avenue NW offers a promising example. The Brooks fully serves its residents, meeting their needs, and has increasingly been embraced by the nearby community.

4. While TENAC does not favor a blanket moratorium on all vouchers, one candidate has suggested a moratorium (temporary) on all vouchers? Would you support this?

The discussion about how to fix the issues around these programs will be difficult and there actually will be a pretty steep hill to get others from around the city and in the advocacy community to be sympathetic. Calls for a moratorium on new vouchers from a Ward Three candidate or Councilmember, when the biggest issue on the minds of many across the city is how do we house people who need to be housed, is the surest way to shut down the conversation and walk into an unfair, stereotyped view of Ward Three. Moreover, it does nothing to address the issues raised by the programs as implemented today. We need to win allies to address these issues and, therefore, our efforts need to be sensitive to how others will see the situation and our positions on the issues. Like it or not, there is a fair amount of education that will need to be done to get others around the city to see the issues more clearly.

5. Would you support instead a temporary moratorium on voucher recipients being placed in rent control buildings until a remedy is worked out? This is to preserve the remaining rent control housing that is quickly being devastated by the mayor's destructive policy. Note: during any moratorium for rent control voucher placements, voucher holders can be placed in new or nonrent control buildings. (Such placement in new and nonrent control housing would actually be more in line with the luxury rent rents prices vouchers pay).

I would want promptly to explore issues around this. In this context, there is a special circumstance – one form of affordable housing – vouchers – cannibalizing another form – rent stabilized units I do not think immediately calling for the kind of moratorium suggested, however, will be productive. I am a strong supporter of rent control, and I do think

conducting the kind of hearing suggested in Question 1 can contribute to the groundwork needed to address these issues. Again, I am sympathetic to the idea that one should call for action immediately, but while that may be a satisfying tack from an advocacy perspective, it may not be the most effective tack to actually make progress. I want to make progress and I think that starts with getting information out there and beginning the process of persuading members of the Council and Administration. Meanwhile, the recent HUD report and movement on the Council vis-à-vis DCHA creates an opening for the kind of scrutiny in the setting of Council hearings that is desperately needed.

VOUCHER PLACEMENTS DESTROYING RENT CONTROL FOR THE WORKFORCE

The methodology and target of the mayor's policy of placing harmful voucher tenants in rent control units clearly indicates it is being done to destroy rent control. The much higher rent amounts that vouchers pay will eventually replace all rent control housing. RESIDENTS NEED AFFORDABLE HOUSING NOT ITS DESTRUCTION.

6. Eventually, only the poor (through vouchers) and the very wealthy (in newer, expensive housing) will be able to live in DC. No workforce residents, such as teachers, service personnel, government employees and the like will be able to live here. Do you see this as a problem? And if so, What is your solution to this problem?

This is a serious problem. While housing for low-income residents has to be a priority, creating and protecting options for middle class residents is equally important. I will work to protect and expand rent control, ensure that new projects include substantial workforce housing, look for opportunities for dedicated workforce housing opportunities and look for ways to provide additional subsidies to categories of workers such as front line workers including police, firefighters, teachers and nurses to make more housing options in the Ward and city accessible to them.

7. Would you commit to hearings on the issue of preserving (and expanding) workforce housing and the problem of the destruction of rent control for the workforce by voucherization, in order to identify possible solutions?

Yes.

8. Would you commit to expanding rent control to current buildings? (Presently rent control only applies to buildings built after 1975, whose landlords own five or more units,).

Yes.

9. A LEAKING BUCKET: WHY. Due to current policy, no matter how much affordable housing is enacted by the council, before any construction begins, our developer-mayor waives the affordability requirements mandated by law, so developers can instead build luxury housing. From our understanding, this power to waive affordability requirements is not statutory. Instead the mayor is claiming to have “implied” authority to do so. Would you commit to clarifying, or abolishing the mayor’s supposed authority to waive affordability requirements so the law’s requirements are carried out?

Yes. Inclusionary Zoning requirements – the obligation to have a certain percentage of units in a new project be affordable – are there for a reason.