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My CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE – ISSUES AND RESPONSES

The following is slightly edited from TENAC:

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 who are not ready for independent living need “wrap around” social services. Being placed recklessly or intentionally in rent control buildings without the special support services that these tenants need has had unwelcome 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)? **YES**

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? **YES**

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**

4. While TENAC does not favor a blanket moratorium on all vouchers, one candidate has suggested a moratorium (temporary) on all vouchers. TENAC loves voucher tenants and would never suggest a cessation or moratorium on housing unhoused people. Would you support instead a temporary re-directing of voucher recipients from being placed in rent control buildings until a remedy is worked out? We support this position in order 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). **YES**

OVERALL VOUCHER PLACEMENTS IS DESTROYING RENT CONTROL FOR THE WORKFORCE

The methodology and target of the mayor's policy of placing unprepared voucher tenants in rent control units (housing built before 1976) clearly indicates it is being done to destroy rent control according to TENAC. The mayor's Cash2Covenant policy and Rock Creek Roadmap plainly outlines her policy of converting, under a covenant or covenant-like agreement, workforce rental housing into voucher housing. (Why not direct voucher tenants to newer building that are nonrent control? The extremely high rent rates vouchers command is in keeping with these higher priced, newer rental buildings. Too many DC tax dollars are being used to simply line landlord pockets by this policy of placing high paying vouchers into rent control units. Vouchers are sometimes paying double the actual rent control rates on apartments. This is a grand waste of taxpayer money. Worse, The much higher rent amounts that vouchers pay will eventually replace all rent control housing. RESIDENTS NEED AFFORDABLE HOUSING NOT ITS DESTRUCTION.

5. 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?

The following includes my proposed solutions, besides of course the imperative need to expand the protections of Rent Control as advocated by TENAC.

Poverty reduction starting with the elimination of child poverty should have the highest priority for the Council's action. The high income and wealth gap in DC is the result of the long standing trickle- down economic agenda of our elected government. The alternative agenda which I will promote includes immediately increasing the required allotment of housing in the Housing Production Trust Fund (HPTF) going to these residents, including permanent housing for the homeless, with stronger enforcement, given the deficiencies noted in the DC Auditor's report. I already testified on October 20, 2022 in support of Bill 24-0893, the "Rapid Re-Housing Reform Amendment Act of 2022" which is a big improvement over the present policy. Nevertheless, a big challenge is the lack of sufficient caseworkers for those who are being rehoused (see AnneMarie Cuccia, "DC ends fiscal year with hundreds of vouchers left, Street Sense, October 26 to November 1, 2022 issue, p.6-7). B24-0802 - Green New Deal for Housing Amendment Act of 2022 should be passed to create social housing and establish a DC Public Bank in partnership. *The provision of affordable housing should be decommmodified, i.e., housing as a human right.* Hence, the HPTF should be phased out with its taxpayers' funding used to promote social housing along with the stronger implementation of DOPA and TOPA. Community land trusts should also be expanded to provide permanent affordability. Home ownership for our Black residents will be enhanced by this agenda, along with more generous subsidies for first-time buyers. For example, social housing with rents held at no more than 30% of household income will free up savings for homeownership. Documentation: Here is an estimate of how far we are in DC from real affordability as HUD so defines as no more than 30% of household income going to housing: without assistance from the DC government, the bottom 60% of families in terms of income would pay at the very least 50% of their income for housing as renters for market housing, based on the latest rent data (excluding elderly, data from ITEP, Who Pays?, 2020). Average market rates are: One bedroom: \$2,464/month; Two bedroom: \$3,465/month (Source: <https://www.rent.com/district-of-columbia/washington-apartments/rent-trends>). For 2016- 2020, data shows that 46% of renters were paying more than 30% of their household income for rent <https://www.dchealthmatters.org/indicators/index>, with low- income renters being the most highly burdened. The HPTF, the main program creating affordability has failed miserably, trickle-down economics!

6. 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**

7. 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**

8. 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**