

Testimony of Alquanita Williams

Before the D.C. Council Committee on Human Services
Budget Hearings for the Department of Human Services

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My name is Alquanita Williams and I am the mother of 2 sons and am currently in housing with the Community Partnership but we used to be homeless. I became homeless due to mental illness and the fact that my past landlord considered me a hoarder. The last time I went to court, I was severely depressed and could not keep up with my household duties. I told them I would leave if they gave me 90 days to move. The property manager told me she could not allow me 90 days. I asked the judge if the eviction notice still counts even though she scratched it out and change the date of the evictions. But the Judge said it was ok for them to do. I was feeling suicidal and felt there was nowhere to turn. When I got home they sent me another notice that said I had until September to move but the manager moved the date up. One day the manager came over and asked why I was still there, I told her I had nowhere to go. My income was only \$370 per month from TANF. I called your office Councilmember Graham, the Collaborative, and no one was able to help. The next day, the Marshals came to make sure I got all I could and they put my furniture and most of my belongings the curb. I got what I could get and left. The manager told one of my neighbors that I was being evicted for owing \$13 which was not true.

The next day, I called your office again and asked if someone would intervene for me and help me get the rest of my stuff because I had a U-haul. When I called the property manager and asked if I could come get the rest of my belongings I was told everything was gone. I found out that the she allowed maintenance to come in through the back of the apartment and take what they wanted of my belonging and throw the rest in the dumpster. I stayed with my sister some days, at the bus stops, and through it all, tried to keep my kids in school.

At one point, someone called CFSA on me for neglect. I asked CFSA if they could help me with finding shelter but I was told that was not what they are there for. She said they were there to help the children. Well, **in order for the child to succeed, the parents have to succeed!** At this point, someone from the Shaw collaborative said they had found a place for me at DC General when I got there, the space was gone. All in all, I stayed with my dad and my sister and wherever I could find a place for a year until July 30th in 2010 when I got into DC General. I was told your shelter stay is only for 6 months and I did stay for 6 months but I think it's because I was active and doing advocacy on my own to move out of shelter.

I think shelter is extremely important because it is still a home. Even though your name is not on the door, you are still together with your family and that is important in a crisis. Your family is safe and has stability. Without shelter, my family would not be together.

My youngest child knew he had somewhere to stay and that we did not have to worry about people taking away our food. He was able to get back and forth to school. He still had friends. He did not have as much fear as he had when we were moving place to place. I met helpful people who could help me. Being in a shelter was like being in a community within in a community. You meant people who were like you.

I honestly think if the city does not provide some form of shelter by reducing capacity, you are going to have a much higher suicide rate and abandonment of children. As a parent, you may allow you child to be placed in the system for the stability they will have. The crime rate will go up. People are going to have to make money for their children through drugs, prostitution, and robberies. You are going to see these crimes go up because people are going to have to do what they have to do to support their children.

I think when it comes to domestic violence, if there is no place for them to escape to they are going to stay. This is going to result in into two things: death (either man or woman) and more child abuse. If there is not shelter set up and I was in an abusive relationship and was told there is nothing available, I am going to feel defeated and stay. And I will be beat to a pulp and my kids will witness it and will grow up and start to try and defend me, the mother. This will lead to more violence in the homes and the community when people feel frustrated and like they have no options.

I have a friend who is trying to stand on her own and has no support from her family and I have a nephew who feels like there is nothing out there for him, it is hopelessness and despair for them because of no shelter. When you are hopeless you can turn to drugs, alcohol, and sex. And there are people still eating out of trash cans because they have no support or way out.

I do also think there should be more support services in the shelters for parents. They need support like, job training, job support services, GED classes, programs for the kids to go to while the parents are trying to improve their situation, and other supports. People are fighting with each other because they have no support. I also think there should be something for children like Playtime Project. We went through the stress of being homeless, losing everything we had, but at least Playtime gave my youngest son a sense of hope. When the parents are going through something, kids have to grow up fast, once a parent is allowed to be parent, kids can be kids. Playtime gave him a chance to be a kid where he did not have to take on an adult role. The shelters also have to improve case management and food services. I know people can only do what they can with what they have, but the city should be providing more services in the shelters besides just putting a roof over families heads (for which I was grateful.)

This budget is about more than just a \$20.5 million dollar shortfall, it's about cutting families. I hope you find the money to fill the gap so these critical services won't be discontinued. Thank you for your time and I look forward to any questions.