



Deeply affordable. Thriving neighborhoods. Nearby services.

Testimony of Samuel Buggs
Board Member and Resident of Jubilee Housing
Before
Councilmember Anita Bonds, Chairman
Committee on Housing and Executive Administration
Public Witness Budget Hearing
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Good morning, Chairman Bonds and members of the Committee. My name is Samuel Buggs, and I am a member of the Board of Directors for Jubilee Housing, as well as a resident of Jubilee's Maycroft building in Columbia Heights. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Jubilee Housing works to build Justice Housing, which is deeply affordable housing, in thriving neighborhoods, with supportive services onsite and within walking distance. These programs are necessary for low-income District residents; especially for returning citizens such as myself, who face even stronger barriers to finding stable and quality housing. Given proper assistance and opportunities, a lot of the men and women who are returning from incarceration can become productive, outstanding community members. The path to success would be much easier if affordable housing was available from the day of release.

Over my time struggling to successfully reenter society, I eventually discovered how difficult it is to secure housing. When I was last released after a few periods of incarceration amounting to about 25 years, I realized that many things have improved about the way that returning citizens are viewed and supported, but it is still very difficult. Previously, I had been able to stay at my mother's house when I was released from serving time. However, once she passed away, I had nowhere to go and was subsequently homeless. I was forced to stay in hotels or at people's houses for a cost, all while continuing to engage in criminal activity. Finally, I got sick and tired of my lifestyle and using drugs. In March of 2012 I was able to become a part of this community through my mental health case worker at Community Connections. I got connected with Christ House, which was a place for homeless people who struggled with medical conditions. I lived there for 6 or 7 years, and through Christ House I was introduced to their community partner: Jubilee Housing.

When I first lived at Jubilee Housing I saw how different it was from any other housing situation I had been in. Other than housing, much to my surprise, I saw that Jubilee offered the wraparound services that it provides like employment help, education, family services, and more. I have lived my whole life in DC, and I have never been involved with a housing complex that had all of the programs that Jubilee has. This was a turning point for me as I began to get very interested in Jubilee's mission. While living in Jubilee's Euclid building, I first became a volunteer at the Teen Renaissance program that prepared young people for college, and was for both Jubilee residents and other kids in the community. Then I began to get more involved, and in 2017 I was asked to become a board member. Since then I have risen to new heights in leadership, serving recently as vice chair of the Jubilee Housing Board.

The Reentry Transitional Housing Program is Jubilee's response to target housing, community support, and comprehensive services explicitly to returning citizens. However, units are very limited. I believe that it is necessary to invest more in supportive housing that is specific to returning citizens.

Significant funding is needed in this budget to support the Housing Production Trust Fund (HPTF) and the Local Rest Supplement Program (LRSP), with additional capital set aside specifically for units that house returning citizens. The property where I live was developed using the HPTF and LRSP. Forty of my neighbors benefit from LRSP, and all 64 of us benefit from the HPTF. Residents of Jubilee Housing would not be able to live in thriving neighborhoods like Adams Morgan and Columbia Heights without these supports. My neighbors wouldn't have access to supportive services such as the teen center and employment assistance without these funds.

Finally, returning citizens face extra challenges to securing housing and becoming productive members of society. The District should prioritize budget funds to reflect their commitment to supporting this vulnerable population.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you. I am willing to answer any questions you may have.