



Good Faith Communities Coalition

Taking action on homelessness and affordable housing with and for the poor in the District of Columbia

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January 24, 2018

"Permanent" and Sustainable Housing for Families Living in Deep Poverty

On January 21 Mayor Bowser announced that [DC General will close permanently in Fall 2018](#). Everyone applauds closing this structure, which is totally unsuitable for families. Most current residents at DC General will move to "permanent" housing through the Rapid Re-Housing program (RRH), the program the city uses almost exclusively to move families from shelter to housing.

RRH is a one year rental assistance program. The RRH tenant is the lease holder and pays at least 40% of their income for rent. The city pays the remainder of the rent monthly for the program year. After the year, the tenant as lease holder is responsible for the full rent at market rate (\$1746 per month for a 2 BR apartment on average).



The question debated extensively in the Council in recent months is whether the housing provided through RRH is indeed "permanent", as the Department of Human Services contends. There was no agreed upon definition of "permanent", nor was a successful outcome for program participants defined. The council voted 11-2 in December to validate RRH as a one-year program to be used for shelter exit.

According to the Department of Human Services 20 to 25% of the households in the RHH one-year program will not be able to pay full-market rent in the following year. The housing is not "permanent" for these households. They will either move out at the end of the year or be evicted. In the short to mid-term, these households will more than likely be on the road to homelessness - again.

For these families living in deep poverty there is no quick solution to their housing instability. If household income is entirely from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF pays \$504 a month for a family of 3) as is the case for many shelter residents, it is unlikely that one year of rental assistance is going to lead to "permanent" housing. The Chair of the Council Committee on Human Services says the city can't provide rental vouchers for everyone who is rent burdened. Given the cost of long-term rental vouchers and the lack of political will to create additional vouchers, she is probably correct. **But then, what? A repeating cycle of homelessness?**



In a recent article in the [Washington Post](#) (12/18/17) former Mayor Anthony Williams reflected on the city today: "We have to keep the city growing, but we have challenges in terms of making the city more inclusive, increasing affordable housing and improving social services." Mayor Williams championed the real estate market in the 1990's as the answer to

city's future. As he looks at situation now, he continues: "But there was a flip side: That wave was not lifting all boats, but battering the heck out of the poor."

But then, what? The Mayor's FY2019 proposed budget will be delivered to the Council on March 21st. The Mayor speaks about frequently about a 'Pathway to the Middle Class' for everyone. RRH is not a rental assistance program that works for everyone in shelter. More needs to be done for those living in deep poverty so that their boat is lifted and truly "permanent" housing is the successful outcome that the city's intervention achieves.

"If I may do so without being disrespectful, I want to suggest that homelessness and poverty are, for our era, the equivalent of slavery and segregation: institutions that blight and stunt human life, causing misery, illness and death. Indeed, the battle against homelessness and poverty is in several ways a continuation of the movements to abolish slavery and de jure and de facto segregation."

Florence Wagman Roisman, *The Lawyer as Abolitionist: Ending Homelessness and Poverty in Our Time*. St. Louis University, *Public Law Review*, v. 19, #2 (2000).



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Good Faith Communities Coalition
goodfaithdc@gmail.com
<http://www.goodfaithdc.org>

