

# **WASHINGTON LEGAL CLINIC FOR THE HOMELESS, INC.**

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The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless ("WLCH") believes that every human being has a right to live in housing. We applaud any efforts by Mayor Fenty or President Obama to prevent homelessness by keeping people in their homes and to end homelessness by increasing access to affordable, permanent housing. WAMU misconstrued our position for a story on the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program ("HPRP") funding, which ran the morning of December 1<sup>st</sup>. Our concern, which was taken out of context in the WAMU story, is that life-saving shelter not be reduced below the need while the homeless services system is transitioning from a shelter-based system to one rooted in permanent housing.

Despite the laudable efforts and significant funding the Fenty administration has put towards increasing access to affordable housing for chronically homeless individuals and families, the District still has 26,000 households on the waitlist for subsidized housing, including 13,000 who are homeless. As the Urban Institute noted in their 2009 Housing in the Nation's Capital report, "without significant increases, subsidized housing will not fill the gap" in housing affordability and stem the tide of those in need of shelter. Moreover, due to the economy, homelessness – especially amongst families – is rising at a very precipitous rate (by 20% during the period of January 2008 to January 2009). Over the past several months the family emergency shelter system has been at capacity with – for the first time ever – over 400 families on the waiting list for emergency shelter. The HPRP funds will help ease this crisis by preventing more families from falling into homelessness, and WLCH welcomes this funding wholeheartedly. In addition to this funding, however, more resources need to be identified and dedicated to the homeless services safety net – including shelter – so that the District can ensure that no family has to sleep outside on a cold fall night. We look forward to – and commit ourselves to working towards – the day when shelters can be closed because enough affordable housing and prevention funds exist to help all families in need; unfortunately that day is still far off.

**Marta Beresin**  
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