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COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

3

PUBLIC HEARING

4

COMMITTEE ON LAW AND GOVERNMENT

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Room 696, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Thursday, November 20, 2003

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RESOLUTION 030227 - Resolution authorizing
the City Council Committee on Law and
Government to investigate the effectiveness
and efficiency of the delivery of public
housing resources and services to the low
and moderate income residents of
Philadelphia by the Philadelphia Housing
Authority in cooperation with the City of
Philadelphia...

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PRESENT:

16

COUNCILMAN DAVID COHEN, Chair
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN MICHAEL NUTTER
COUNCILMAN FRANK RIZZO

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2 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I'm going to
3 announce the opening of the Law and
4 Government's renewed hearing on the
5 Philadelphia Housing authority. This is a
6 continuing hearing, and a quorum is present in
7 that the quorum exists from previous hearings.
8 This is a continuous hearing. There's been a
9 series of hearings every since PHA decided it
10 is free to choose whether or not to come. So
11 I think people are interested in Philadelphia
12 in finding out what's going to be the end of
13 the story.

14 I'm convinced the end of the story
15 will be that the heads of PHA, whoever they
16 may be at the time, will learn that they will
17 have to respond to City Council as a
18 legislative authority in the City. And
19 although it is the question of whether the
20 City contributes or how much it contributes is
21 not the decisive factor in the City Council's
22 power to subpoena.

23 PHA is an agency that in different
24 pieces of literature claims to house 78,000
25 Philadelphians. It is the largest landlord.

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2 Some people call it the slum lord of
3 Philadelphia. What this hearing is aimed at,
4 among other things, is to find out if that
5 name is accurate, whether it's a landlord or
6 slum lord.

7 Some people will be here today who
8 thought they were going to a meeting of the
9 Executive Board, only to learn that the place
10 had been changed without any notice to them.
11 Well, that kind of unconcern about people's
12 rights is something that marks PHA beyond all
13 other agencies. Any agency that serves to
14 house thousands of Philadelphians and is the
15 single largest landlord in the City by far --
16 I think it's bigger than next four largest
17 landlords added together. Any agency that
18 houses that many people and employs 2000, less
19 or more -- we'll find out in testimony -- is
20 certainly responsible to the people of
21 Philadelphia.

22 There's nothing in the statement of
23 powers of City Council that limits
24 Philadelphia City Council in its efforts to
25 investigate conditions which will finally

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2 result in legislation affecting the welfare of
3 Philadelphians to agencies supported only by
4 Philadelphia government. We have the right to
5 investigate private businesses if that
6 investigation is part of our legislative
7 pursuits. And we get many complaints from
8 people, some of whom live in PHA developments,
9 some of whom work for PHA, that it more than
10 any other agency grievously abuses the rights
11 of the people who work for it and who live in
12 its properties. So this Committee will always
13 follow the policy of being open and available
14 to people.

15 Now, today we're going to follow a
16 policy of interrupting our planned agenda for
17 today to hear what people want to know.
18 First, I'm going to ask the residents who have
19 come here believing there was going to be a
20 meeting of the Executive Board -- did you
21 think it was downstairs in the Conversation
22 Hall? Where did you expect the meeting to
23 take place? Is there somebody who would like
24 to be a spokesperson for the people from the
25 various developments?

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2 Suppose we begin -- I was given a
3 list by my staff, and to prevent insurrection
4 on their part, let me accept their
5 recommendations to begin with. Therefore, I
6 will call as the first witness Tiffany
7 Andrews.

8 MS. ALI: Tiffany went to get her
9 children, Councilman. She'll be right back.

10 COUNCILMAN COHEN: All right. Then
11 we'll go on to the next witness, Percy Banton
12 (ph). Is Percy Banton here?

13 Percy, would you come forward to the
14 table where the microphone is?

15 Now, because there are a good number
16 of witnesses, I'm going to ask that there be
17 brevity in what you say and proceed to tell us
18 whatever you think we ought to know about
19 whatever problem you are having or want to
20 talk about.

21 Mr. Banton, go ahead. Tell us what
22 brought you here today and why you think we
23 ought to know it.

24 MR. BANTON: What brought me here
25 today is the shelter system, the people that

1 Greene

2 are in shelter system. It's no PHA housing.

3 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Start by giving
4 your name; and if you live in the development
5 or work in the development, please identify
6 that, then tell us the nature of the question.

7 You are Habib Ali?

8 MS. ALI: Yes, Councilman.

9 COUNCILMAN COHEN: You can act as
10 the informal advisor. I've known you for many
11 years.

12 MS. ALI: Yes, sir.

13 MR. BANTON: My name is Percy
14 Banton --

15 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Feel at home.
16 But you have to speak directly into the
17 microphone so you will be heard.

18 MR. BANTON: My name Percy Banton,
19 and I'm currently homeless right now. And we
20 had came from PHA on a demonstration we had
21 earlier today. We was coming down here for
22 their Board meeting or something, and they had
23 moved it.

24 But my gripe with PHA is that under
25 the OESS system, Office of Emergency Shelter

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2 Services, we have no type of housing available
3 under that system for the men or the women
4 with children. That's my argument.

5 And then with Carl Greene, what
6 they're trying to do with the cuts, I mean,
7 you know, upping the rent with the people
8 that's already in the units and stuff like
9 that there, there's just no affordable housing
10 for none of the homeless people. It's like
11 they make the shelters permanent housing, and
12 that's not the solution; it's only supposed to
13 be temporarily.

14 And ex-offenders, we're not eligible
15 for no type of housing. Even if you finish
16 your parole, your probation and done
17 everything that's required of you, we're still
18 not eligible for housing. It's no housing
19 under the OESS umbrella. And the homeless
20 people should have first priority at getting
21 the PHA or Section 8 voucher. There's nothing
22 there for us. So people are becoming homeless
23 at a rapid pace for whatever different
24 reasons. And the shelters are just not the
25 way; it's supposed to be temporarily.

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2 And Mr. Carl Greene, he don't want
3 to answer to ya'll; he don't want to answer to
4 us. He's holding back 20-something hundred
5 vouchers that can go to families and single
6 women or whoever supposed to get them.
7 They're not getting them. You understand?

8 And single men, we sho-nuff can't
9 get nothing right now. So I have no other
10 choice but to fight. You know what I mean? I
11 have to fight. That's just where I'm at,
12 whatever it takes. Because I feel as though
13 Carl Greene, he has to answer to ya'll, to us.
14 He owe the people some answers. Why is he
15 doing what he's doing? Because if you're
16 homeless, you're entitled to housing. Nobody
17 asks to be homeless. Anybody can become
18 homeless for various and different reasons. A
19 lot of them is just a paycheck away from being
20 where I'm at or whatever, but then you walk
21 over us like we don't exist or whatever. We
22 do exist. Everybody ought to be entitled to
23 some type of affordable housing.

24 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Well, that's
25 supposed to be one of the main purposes of

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2 City government is to provide a program of
3 affordable housing.

4 Ever since Mr. Greene has been the
5 Executive Director of Philadelphia Housing,
6 two things have happened simultaneously: The
7 waiting list has grown, and the number of
8 units available has grown increasingly fewer
9 and fewer. And there is less housing
10 available today than there was in the days
11 before Mr. Greene came, and he is a strong
12 advocate of reducing the number of Section 8
13 vouchers and reducing the number of affordable
14 housing for the poor. He is an advocate for
15 market rate housing to be inter-mixed with
16 housing provided by Philadelphia Housing
17 Authority with a net effect being that there's
18 much less housing available for the people who
19 need it most. And that's been a problem that
20 we're trying to get to. And I guess that's
21 one of the main reasons, in my judgment, why
22 Mr. Greene is so anxious to keep things
23 hidden. He doesn't want people to know that
24 instead of being an advocate for housing, in
25 fact, is an advocate of less housing for the

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2 people who need it most. And I think that's
3 one of the serious problems we have to deal
4 with in Philadelphia.

5 Further, he's supported in all of
6 his bad behavior by the Mayor, because I
7 cannot believe for a moment that the Mayor who
8 is most influential in Mr. Greene's
9 appointment is powerless to act. The Mayor
10 appoints basically -- between the Mayor and
11 the City Controller, they appoint all the
12 members of the Housing Board, the Board you
13 thought you were going to be meeting with.
14 And there's one easy way to solve everything
15 at PHA, and that is by the Mayor informing Mr.
16 Greene and others that unless they shape up
17 immediately and treat people with respect and
18 with concern that they're not going to --
19 well, they'll be wasting their time reporting
20 to work because they're not going to get paid
21 anymore. And Mr. Greene gets an exorbitant
22 salary which he tries to keep hidden. As the
23 exponent for people, I believe his salary now
24 is somewhere between 150 and \$175,000 a year,
25 while that's far from the income that a person

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2 who lives in housing.

3 Now, I think your point is well
4 taken. We know that supportive services by
5 Philadelphia City government has also dropped
6 sharply during the period that Mr. Greene has
7 taken over as Executive Director.

8 And so we have very basic complaints
9 about housing. We know that the workers who
10 work for Housing Authority are being
11 confronted by Mr. Greene with facing a future
12 of retirement that is based, not on their base
13 salary, say, over a three-year period as
14 exists in Philadelphia if you work in regular
15 City government. You, say, work 30 years,
16 your salary is based upon the best three years
17 of your career. Apparently, under Mr. Greene,
18 we're being told, the salary is dependent upon
19 the current three years of service and the
20 next 20 or 30 years play very little role in
21 determining how much you earn at retirement.

22 Now, that's part of the overall
23 attack by different groups of people on the
24 retirement rights of poor people. Poor people
25 and low income people have to understand if

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2 they're going to be trained to fight for their
3 rights, they have to understand that they're
4 always the targets of bad government policy.
5 The government seems to push people in two
6 directions, make the rich richer and the poor
7 poorer when it ought to be exact reverse.

8 So that's why we want Philadelphia,
9 the birth place of the nation, to be the birth
10 place of new policies for City government,
11 policies that put human rights and human
12 welfare first and the profits of rich business
13 people second -- maybe not even second, maybe
14 they ought to be down at the end of the list,
15 but certainly not first on the list.

16 So we thank you very much Mr. Banton
17 for your concern.

18 MS. ALI: Councilman, Ms. Andrews
19 has returned.

20 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Very good.
21 Welcome to the hearing. Why don't you tell us
22 your story?

23 And the next witness after that will
24 be -- I believe we're going to change the
25 schedule. I understand Mr. Phil Lord, whom

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2 I've known for many, many years and who's an
3 activist over many years standing for the
4 people is here. And after Tiffany, I would
5 like to ask him to speak.

6 I hope you excuse us, Habib, and you
7 follow him, all right?

8 MS. ALI: Yes, sir.

9 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Tiffany, tell us
10 what your --

11 MS. ANDREWS: Hello. My name is
12 Tiffany Andrews. I'm kind of nervous, but I'm
13 here to speak up for myself and my family.
14 I'm 25 years old. I live in the South
15 Philadelphia area.

16 COUNCILMAN COHEN: The Chair wants
17 to note the presence of Councilwoman Blackwell
18 and Councilman Rizzo, Members of the
19 Committee. Thank you.

20 Go ahead.

21 MS. ANDREWS: I have four children.
22 I've encountered with plenty of good jobs
23 within the past years. But due to my living
24 situation and my depending on Public
25 Assistance, it has limited me to actually

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2 finding a job paying halfway decent money and
3 being able to make money to save up for a
4 security deposit to move in.

5 I've been on the waiting list for
6 Section 8 and PHA for about -- Section 8 for
7 about three and a half years; and PHA, about
8 two years.

9 Like I said, I call on a daily
10 basis. I call every day, you know, hoping and
11 praying that something different will be said.
12 On numerous times I've called and I've got
13 people with just no kind of caring at all.
14 They'll tell me, "Well, you're still on the
15 waiting list. There's nothing that I can tell
16 you."

17 I say, "Well, ma'am, do you know
18 when the last lottery selection was done?"

19 She said, "In August."

20 I said, "Well, do you know when
21 another one will come up?"

22 She said, "Well, maybe November."

23 Here it is November, I call back and
24 they say, "Well, no, we're not doing a
25 selection this month.

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2 One time I called, they tell me -- I
3 had one operator tell me -- she said, "I know
4 your voice. You can't call here on a constant
5 basis the way you do."

6 I'm like, "Well, ma'am, every time I
7 call, I'm getting told the same thing. I'm
8 calling to try to find out something
9 different."

10 COUNCILMAN COHEN: And you have the
11 right to call, and they have a responsibility
12 to answer. But in their arrogance and their
13 belief that PHA is a separate kingdom
14 somewhere, that's the reason they behave in
15 the terrible manner they behave.

16 MS. ANDREWS: I was down there in
17 June of 2002 to put my daughter on my family
18 size list because they say call if you have
19 any complaints or change of address or
20 anything. So I call there and I have my
21 receipt from June 2002. I called back maybe
22 not even a couple months ago and they say,
23 "Well, we still have your family size as
24 three."

25 Okay. So she said, "You will have

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2 to come in."

3 I went back down, gave them a change
4 of address. She punch my social security
5 number in the computer, my name which is
6 Tiffany Andrews and my social security number
7 -- my social security number was under another
8 person's name. She had to call her supervisor
9 and it was like a problem. Why was my social
10 security under someone else's name.

11 So it's stressed out with four kids,
12 you know, not having a stable place. I don't
13 want to turn to DHS. I'm afraid if I do call
14 DHS and let them know how I'm truly feeling,
15 they'll take my children away from me. My
16 children are not neglected, they're not abused
17 and they're not hungry. I send my son to
18 school every day. But it's hard for me right
19 now. I'm on hard times right now.

20 And I went to a shelter. I went to
21 OESS with my three children; I was pregnant at
22 the time. I went to went St. Barnabus out on
23 60th and Girard. In the summer, I had to come
24 out every day, pregnant with three children
25 and had to stay outside in the hot.

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2 Leaving my home because I didn't
3 come from a good background. My mother is an
4 alcohol. I don't have my father. My brother
5 is there, he's 23 years old. So it's like
6 what do I do now? Go back home, you know. In
7 the mean time I'm still calling Section 8.
8 I'm there at OESS getting 294 every two weeks.
9 I have to pay my mother half. What am I left
10 with? I don't even have enough to save to
11 even try to even have a security deposit to
12 put down or anything. You know, I go down, I
13 ask them, I explain my situation to them. My
14 children's doctor -- all my children were
15 premies and my daughter is asthmatic. My
16 children's doctor has actually wrote me a
17 letter to take to Section 8. They say, "This
18 is not going to do anything for you, this is
19 not going work. All I can tell you is you
20 just have to wait."

21 I don't know what to do anymore. So
22 that's why I've been fighting with Sister
23 Habib and everyone else. I'm here today with
24 my baby. I had to make other arrangements for
25 my other children, but I'm here just to get an

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2 opinion.

3 I went to Councilwoman Jannie
4 Blackwell's office one time. One of her
5 secretaries gave me a list of housing. But
6 what am I to do if I have two evictions on my
7 credit report and don't have no money to even
8 move anywhere? It's nothing to do but to go
9 to the shelter. I cannot go to the shelter
10 with four children with a crib and a bunk bed.
11 It's nothing for me to do.

12 Basically, I'm back at home with my
13 mother. I'm battling that situation out, and
14 it's like a different story every day. I
15 can't really go out and look for a job right
16 now because I need day care. In order to get
17 subsidized, I have to be working. And I have
18 to get on the waiting list and stay on the
19 waiting list for a year to two. So best thing
20 is to stay on Public Assistance, let Public
21 Assistance put me in a program just to get
22 child care.

23 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Well, several
24 months ago, we got a call late in the
25 afternoon, I think it was a Friday afternoon,

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2 about an apartment house where a judge had
3 ordered everybody out of the house because of
4 his fear that the place might have a fire.
5 There was no fire alarm system working. And
6 we discovered that under Mr. Carl Greene that
7 there were no Section 8 vouchers available for
8 housing and people had to be put up at little
9 hotels that were not suitable for their needs
10 as a family unit and it was very expensive to
11 the City. But the supportive services that
12 used to be available were no longer available.
13 So Mr. Greene apparently favors people going
14 to shelters or private rental space to maybe
15 help landlords, I don't know why else the City
16 ought to be paying the high rates of hotels
17 when there's Section 8 housing available that
18 people could shop around and pick the housing
19 they want. Philadelphia is a City where
20 everybody has a right to live wherever they
21 want to live. And a free and open Section 8
22 policy is a sound policy.

23 Over many years we've learned that
24 complaints about Section 8 are often not
25 Section 8 problems at all. But whenever

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2 there's a complaint about a landlord,
3 immediately people are concerned that it's
4 probably Section 8 housing. Wherever there is
5 a Section 8 housing problem, we in the City
6 try to solve it. If people need help, we want
7 to see that they get the help. Some people
8 are not used to living together with other
9 people and maybe they need help when they join
10 a community, they need services, they need
11 help with their children. And since Mr.
12 Greene arrived, those supportive services have
13 been going downhill rapidly.

14 And your problem should never have
15 happened and you should never be treated the
16 way you are, because that's not the way
17 government ought to be treating its citizens.

18 We thank you for your report. But
19 that's why this Committee has been meeting and
20 will continue to meet until the PHA situation
21 gets corrected and people are treated the
22 right way.

23 I want to congratulate you Ms.
24 Andrews for continuing your struggle to be
25 treated as every human being has a right to be

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2 treated. And whatever this Committee can do
3 on your behalf, it will do.

4 MS. ANDREWS: Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Do any of the
6 members of the Committee have any questions
7 they wish to ask of Tiffany Andrews or of
8 Percy Banton?

9 Councilwoman Blackwell, I know your
10 name was mentioned by Tiffany. Is there
11 anything you want to say about that
12 circumstance?

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We are
14 always happy to work with her if she wants to
15 go back on her individual circumstance. I do
16 remember her. And certainly work with Habib
17 Ali and know of her commitment to all people
18 everywhere. So we're always happy to work
19 with any individual tenant on their specific
20 circumstance, and if she will visit us -- I
21 think Penny may still be downstairs. If she
22 is able to go down now or if she wants to come
23 during the day if she wants to stay here for
24 the rest of the hearing, then we'll try to see
25 what we can do. Always happy to look into her

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2 case.

3 COUNCILMAN COHEN: All right. I
4 would take advantage of that offer by
5 Councilwoman Blackwell. Over the years,
6 Councilwoman Blackwell has been a strong
7 fighter for human rights. And we know that we
8 can rely on her. So why don't you get
9 together with Councilwoman Blackwell at some
10 point in time and see if this can be
11 straightened out. At least if we can get some
12 problems straightened out, we're in much
13 better shape.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you,
15 Councilman.

16 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Mr. Lord, the
17 Committee welcomes you here. Mr. Lord,
18 introduce yourself. Tell us a little bit
19 about your experience and then tell us what
20 you'd like us to here.

21 MR. LORD: Thank you for the
22 opportunity to testify this evening. I'm here
23 with Albert C. Wright, our lead organizer from
24 Tenants Action Group of Philadelphia.

25 TAG, as you probably know, has been

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2 involved in the tenant movement for the last
3 30 years. And we've been having the
4 opportunity to work with people who are
5 suffering from PHA policies.

6 In particular, we are forming a
7 City-wide tenants union called TURN, Tenant
8 Union Representative Network. And TURN has
9 been meeting with Section 8 tenants and with
10 people who are homeless who are distraught and
11 distressed because of what PHA is doing.

12 The three things that we're
13 primarily concerned about fall in these
14 categories:

15 One, as already has been mentioned,
16 that PHA is not using the vouchers that it
17 has. And we think this a tragic situation,
18 given the fact that people are staying in
19 shelters for two years and more. We have one
20 of our people who came in our office and is
21 here this evening who's been around five years
22 looking for a place on a waiting list. It's
23 unattainable. They're going off the waiting
24 list but not getting properties.

25 We know that PHA has gotten the

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2 opportunity to issue 2800 new vouchers and
3 have chosen not to do that; they only issued
4 700. And they use that other money for other
5 kinds of services.

6 Now, the high profile issue is that
7 they're using the money for helping Section 8
8 tenants to become better citizens. The fact
9 of the matter is that there are 30 different
10 groups that are being approached, each
11 offering a hundred thousand dollars each to
12 try to do work with Section 8 tenants. That
13 adds up to \$3 million. \$16 million is being
14 saved, which means a lot of money is going to
15 other things that is not really clear to us
16 what that money is going towards. Even that
17 money that's going there to help people who
18 are supposed to need help because they have to
19 be better citizens is misdirected, we believe,
20 because the fact of the matter is, Councilman,
21 as you already said and Carl Greene himself
22 has said, 90 percent of the people that get
23 complained about to PHA are not on Section 8
24 at all. And he said that on the radio
25 himself. So the reality is that the

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2 complaints are coming in for any poor person
3 or any person that seems to be disrupting, and
4 Section 8 program and the housing program is
5 getting blamed for that. And that's the
6 classism and racism we have in the City of
7 Philadelphia, not a matter of the Section 8
8 program.

9 But Section 8 program does have
10 problems in terms of keeping repairs up, in
11 terms of proper maintenance of the properties,
12 in terms of their workers being available to
13 people who have complaints about their
14 landlords. And even though PHA is working on
15 this, this is where the effort needs to be
16 going, not to cutting back vouchers.

17 The other thing that we're very
18 concerned about is the cap on Section 8,
19 seven-year cap on the use of Section 8
20 certificates. We believe this is an
21 irrational program. It reflects the federal
22 program which did not get passed on the
23 federal level and is an abuse of discretion by
24 PHA. The truth of the matter is that people
25 who are thrown off of Section 8 -- it hasn't

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2 happened yet, but people who don't get housing
3 choice vouchers seven years from now may or
4 may not be able to be independent at that
5 point, and that's just completely unfair. If
6 the program doesn't work for them and they
7 still need help, why throw them off? If they
8 haven't had the opportunity to become
9 independent, why throw them off the program?
10 It's irrational, it doesn't make sense if the
11 people are not ready to be off the program at
12 that point. We value independence but not an
13 arbitrary deadline. If someone is prepared
14 before seven years to be independent, they
15 should be off the program then. It's really
16 about being able to be self-sufficient, not
17 about an arbitrary deadline of seven years.

18 And finally, we've heard very
19 recently about the new policy. I don't know
20 if it's passed yet, but being considered, to
21 make everybody pay rent on Section 8. We
22 think this is another instance of abuse of
23 discretion. The fact of the matter is that
24 some people can't afford to pay rent. And
25 even if you have a zero income, they're being

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2 required to pay rent. How can you pay rent if
3 you have a zero income. That doesn't make any
4 sense.

5 So the hardships being imposed are
6 not connected to the ability of the people to
7 pay. And we feel overall that PHA has taken
8 different policies that haven't really helped
9 folks that the program is designed to help.
10 And we would appreciate anything that City
11 Council could do to try to make PHA function
12 better and to eliminate these policies. We
13 think this has to happen soon because people
14 need vouchers. Our people that come to us
15 need vouchers, people in the City Philadelphia
16 generally need vouchers, and we need more
17 affordable housing. It's a desperate need for
18 affordable housing. We've had studies that
19 I'm sure you're aware of that show that the
20 housing need in Philadelphia is in crisis
21 proportions. We want to make sure something's
22 done about that.

23 So we thank you for the time. We
24 have written testimony we'll hand up. We
25 appreciate your concern about this issue and

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2 look forward to further action by City
3 Council.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you very
6 much.

7 Are there any questions by Members of
8 the Committee of Mr. Lord?

9 (No response.)

10 COUNCILMAN COHEN: His record, as I
11 indicated before, is a distinguished one in
12 fighting for housing rights for poor people
13 and working people.

14 You know, we have in this country a
15 strange thing. We have programs aimed at
16 trying to convince people who are dependent on
17 Welfare to work for a living, and instead of
18 work bringing rewards, they learn largely that
19 they have less working than they had when they
20 were on Welfare. They lose, for example,
21 medical services and often their actual dollar
22 income is less.

23 Now, if somebody works and our
24 country is based on the concept of freedom of
25 people to work and responsibility to see that

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2 there are jobs for people, under those
3 circumstances working ought to produce at
4 least one benefit. It ought to give people
5 enough income so families can live like people
6 and not be forced to live by animals, as often
7 they are compelled to these days. Therefore,
8 in any campaign aimed at transferring people
9 from Welfare rolls to the working rolls can't
10 work unless there are certain rewards. One
11 reward being a person can look in the mirror
12 and say, "I can support my family. I'm part
13 of the American workforce. I'm not asking for
14 handouts for anybody because I'm doing work
15 and I'm making a real effort and succeeding in
16 that effort to produce on behalf of the
17 American people."

18 Yet that's not the way we treat --
19 we've developed a phrase "working poor."
20 Those two words don't go together. It's like
21 saying it's a sunny rainy day today. And it's
22 the same kind of concept because it can't
23 exist. And you ought to be poor if you're at
24 work. You ought to be part of the middle
25 class. Maybe not at the top, maybe not even

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2 at the middle, but you certainly ought to be
3 able to walk with your head high in the air
4 knowing you are producing enough to earn a
5 living for yourself and your family and you
6 ought to be entitled to things like medical
7 care and medical benefits instead of being
8 treated by an alley cat with nobody to be
9 concerned about them. Even alley cats often
10 get more medical care from sympathetic people
11 than human beings do in our society. And
12 therefore, we've got to change that.

13 Mr. Lord, I want you to know that
14 your efforts on behalf of working poor people,
15 because that phrase still exists today the way
16 we treat poor people and working people, your
17 efforts are very much appreciated. And before
18 you retire, it may not happen when I retire
19 either underground or whatever happens to
20 older folk, but certainly in your lifetime I'm
21 sure you're going to win the fight. And as
22 long as there's breath in my body, as long as
23 I'm in City Council -- and I wouldn't put any
24 bets on how long that might be, it might be a
25 long time, it might be short time, but we'll

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2 let the Lord make that decision. But for all
3 that time I'm going to be working on behalf of
4 making government treat everybody fairly.
5 That's what people are entitled to. And
6 you're making great contribution to it, Mr.
7 Lord.

8 MR. LORD: Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I'd like to ask
10 Habib Ali and then I will ask for questions
11 from Members of the Committee.

12 MS. ALI: Councilwoman Blackwell did
13 you want to respond to Mr. Lord?

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: If it's
15 okay with the Chair.

16 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Councilwoman
17 Blackwell.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I certainly
19 want to commend Mr. LORD for his commitment in
20 this area over the years. We were both young
21 one and day we're now older, we've been around
22 involved so long. I think that, certainly,
23 I'm glad to have a copy of your testimony. I
24 fought to get on this PHA Board of
25 Commissioners because it is so important to

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2 the people we try to service that we have
3 advocates on the Board. And in fact, today we
4 had another ground breaking at Wilson Homes
5 for more housing for seniors and others, for
6 families 2, 3 and 4 bedroom units. My point
7 is that I think this whole issue of the seven
8 years is one that we can talk about. Thank
9 goodness we're at the beginning of that
10 seven-year, so it gives us time to deal with
11 that as a policy issue.

12 I think the other issue of how we
13 use the vouchers. I think Carl Greene is a
14 visionary. I think he's been creative, I
15 think that we can work together and I ask that
16 we do that. You can contact, certainly,
17 Councilman Cohen or myself or contact me
18 through him, however you're comfortable. We
19 certainly want to give our Chair the respect,
20 so we can talk about the whole issue of
21 vouchers and how they can be used. They have
22 been transformed into housing and other ways
23 that can serve the same constituency. But I
24 think those are issues in terms of what you
25 see, what your vision of the need is. I mean,

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2 they're all people. No matter where we are,
3 it's the same people we're all trying to help.
4 So I think that's something we can do. I
5 think the seven years issue we can talk about.
6 And I think the issue of how we use vouchers
7 is another issue that we can deal with and
8 certainly try to -- and you know, PHA get
9 vouchers get every year, and I think that is
10 one that we can deal with as to what you view
11 as need, what TAG views as need, and how we
12 can best serve the population that we both so
13 desire to. So I look forward to working more
14 closely with you on this.

15 The other issue, the whole pension
16 stuff is separate, but this part -- and I know
17 all that's in legal-smegal, but certainly the
18 whole issue of affordable housing for people
19 in need is one that's my commitment, the one
20 that He above gave me to deal with and that is
21 my life-long commitment. I'm happy to work
22 with you in this regard.

23 MR. LORD: Thank you

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you,

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2 Councilman.

3 COUNCILMAN COHEN: We all appreciate
4 the remarks of Councilwoman Blackwell who, as
5 you all know, is Majority Leader and Chairman
6 of the Finance Committee for City Council, and
7 she expresses in addition to her role as
8 leader of the Council forces in the 3rd
9 District in Philadelphia, she also expresses
10 them on a City-wide basis, holding two
11 City-wide positions in City Council. So we
12 thank you and are looking forward to working
13 very diligently with Councilwoman Blackwell to
14 straighten out PHA and get it to work for
15 Philadelphia the way it ought to work.

16 Now, Habib Ali, you're next. What
17 comments do you wish to make?

18 MS. ALI: Yes, Councilman. I'd like
19 to thank you for giving us an opportunity to
20 be heard this evening. I want to thank the
21 Councilpeople who are present. And I'd like
22 to know, did the other Councilpeople, were
23 they aware that you were having a hearing this
24 evening? Because their empty seats is not
25 taken well.

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2 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Well, I have to
3 tell you, I was very impolite to my colleagues
4 the last couple of days. We've been
5 considering rich men's problems like should we
6 get rid of the old Sam Eric but retain its
7 historic traditions and have a new concert
8 theater. And I was very concerned that the
9 hearings on that attracted lots of
10 Councilmembers. But when people come to
11 complain about the conditions like today,
12 there are very few Councilmembers who seem
13 interested to listen to them. And I don't
14 think that's a good example for Council to
15 behave in that fashion.

16 So I think you're right, but
17 attendance at Council hearings is a matter
18 that's voluntary to a Councilmember. The only
19 resort people have in the democratic form of
20 government is the election process. And I
21 think on the whole we have a pretty good
22 Council. We're working very hard to establish
23 its independence so that its decisions
24 represent the thinking of the ordinary people
25 of Philadelphia. Most of us in City Council

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2 believe that we actually have much more
3 contact with the people of Philadelphia than
4 the Mayor does, because the Mayor is too busy
5 cutting ribbons of opening new business
6 places, deciding how much money he needs for
7 his campaigns and how he's going to get it.

8 We in City Council raise far less
9 money and spend much more time with people out
10 in the area. And we want to have a
11 cooperative arrangement with the Mayor, but
12 our Mayor does not seem to believe that
13 anybody except he ought to participate in
14 decision-making in the City. And for that
15 reason, we've not been able to get him to work
16 with us.

17 Imagine a Mayor permitting a person
18 appointed by him to behave as Mr. Greene
19 behaves. It's unthinkable, because what we
20 have is anarchy in government.

21 The Mayor has known about Mr.
22 Greene's refusal to obey Council subpoenas or
23 to accept Council invitations. What does he
24 do? Twice already he's asked us for delays,
25 that he thinks he'll straighten the matter

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2 out. And then there's no indication that he
3 does anything because Mr. Greene continues in
4 his unreasonable behavior toward City Council.
5 And that's what our concern is.

6 We want the Members of Council -- we
7 have a good Council, in my judgment. Every
8 Member works very hard. Even if I spend most
9 of my time disagreeing with some member
10 doesn't mean he's not working hard. We
11 represent different views; and that's okay.
12 It's good for people in a legislative body to
13 represent all the views that exist in
14 government. But the one thing most important
15 is that people agree on one thing and that's
16 the main function of City government has to be
17 making sure that people are treated fairly and
18 honorably. And that's not the case today in
19 Philadelphia, and that's what we've got to
20 change and why we call on the Mayor to
21 cooperate with us.

22 So Habib Ali, why don't you proceed?

23 MS. ALI: Yes, Councilman. I want
24 to thank you. I'm here on a few topics, but
25 they're all related to housing.

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2 As you and some of the
3 Councilmembers may know, I'm a formerly
4 homeless mother of four children out of the
5 late '80s and have been an advocate fighting
6 for the rights of fair, decent, accessible,
7 affordable housing for people in Philadelphia
8 ever since.

9 There are several things that are
10 going on that we are very discouraged with
11 PHA. First and foremost, I must say, while I
12 was blessed to raise three of my four children
13 in subsidized housing, I was recently laid off
14 from very gainful employment. My unemployment
15 has expired, and I'm currently receiving
16 Public Assistance. I was forced to sign in
17 April a contract stating that I would be out
18 of Section 8 subsidized housing in seven
19 years. I was also told that if I didn't sign
20 that contract, as the rest of the women in the
21 room, that we would lose our Section 8 subsidy
22 immediately.

23 I felt as though I was being
24 threatened. And when I told the women how to
25 sign, UCC1-207 so that they would not held

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2 accountable because we were being coerced to
3 sign this contract, PHA called seven police
4 officers on me and a group of women. And I
5 explained to them that they would be signing
6 their children into homelessness in a matter
7 of seven years. No one said it would be case
8 by case. No one said that if you couldn't
9 afford fair market rent or afford
10 homeownership within the seven-year time
11 period there would be any accommodations. In
12 2010, seven years from now, we're going to
13 have droves and droves of homeless people on
14 the streets of Philadelphia. I don't think
15 that that's something that we want.

16 We also realized that \$48 million
17 went back to Department of Housing and Urban
18 Development, unspent money that was earmarked
19 for Section 8 vouchers in the City of
20 Philadelphia. Mr. Greene, as Mr. Lord
21 informed you, is currently sitting on 2100
22 vouchers that he's refusing to release when we
23 have thousands of people on the waiting list,
24 thousands of people in the homeless shelters.
25 The \$48 million that went back would have

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2 eliminated that Section 8 housing waiting
3 list. It would have wiped it out. I don't
4 know if it's advantageous to have a list, if
5 it's keeping people employed, but it is
6 totally unacceptable.

7 Now PHA has moved their visions from
8 Section 8 tenants to PHA Public Housing
9 tenants where, I understand, 30 percent of
10 PHA's budget has been cut because they did not
11 pass a federal audit. So they're passing
12 these lack of funding on to the tenants.

13 The PHA rents have not been raised
14 in 14 years. And you may say, well, inflation
15 goes up and everything else goes up but
16 nevertheless, people are going to be raised
17 the PHA rent for people have zero income have
18 to pay \$50 a month and they have to come and
19 report to PHA every 90 days. Now, I don't
20 understand how someone who is reported zero
21 income is being mandated to pay \$50 a month.
22 And in some cases the rent will be raised as
23 high as a hundred dollars a month. This is
24 what the Philadelphia Housing Authority is
25 doing to us right now here today.

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2 There are several things that I want
3 to discuss, and I will not take a lot of time,
4 but a lot of us came here today at 3 o'clock.
5 We were under the understanding that there was
6 going to a PHA Board meeting here in Room 201
7 that happens every month here at 3:00 in 201.
8 And there was no meeting there. There was no
9 sign stating where the meeting was moved to.
10 But we wanted to show our discontent because
11 we were told that the Board would be voting
12 today on passing those rent increases to PHA
13 tenants. I understood that they all were to
14 receive a letter in the mail as to what PHA
15 intentions were and then PHA would have
16 several hearings around the City and then they
17 would go to PHA Board to pass these rental
18 increases.

19 I don't think that the average
20 tenant realizes these increases are being put
21 upon them because PHA has lost funding so
22 they're passing this on onto the backs of the
23 most needy and the poor.

24 While PHA and Section 8 has worked
25 for many people, I don't feel as though, like

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2 myself that had the opportunity to raise my
3 children in subsidized housing, now that I am
4 need of housing, what am I supposed to do? I
5 have put my resume out in many places. I am
6 now going to stay on the Public Assistance
7 because I have a medical condition I have to
8 address. So I'm blessed to have the medical
9 assistance. I have to have surgery. So I'm
10 going to take advantage of that opportunity.

11 We have another crisis that is
12 happening in Philadelphia shelter systems.
13 Councilman, I don't know if you are aware, we
14 have a mother here today to is an ex-offender
15 who has served her time, who has been an
16 outstanding citizen, whose parole has been
17 washed away. As of October 31st, she is free
18 and clear. But because she is a felon, she
19 can't get subsidized housing. Now, I know
20 that this is something that's on the state
21 level, but I'm hoping if there's a
22 Councilperson that is willing to pick up this
23 banner and fight for ex-offenders. There are
24 ex-offender men and women who are stuck in the
25 shelter system who cannot get subsidized

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2 housing. This woman cannot get her child back
3 out of the system until she has housing. She
4 can't get housing because he's an ex-offender.
5 So what was the point in her going to jail,
6 serving her time, walking off her parole, and
7 now she can't get housing? A lot of them
8 shred your application as soon as you show
9 that you are a former convict. You can't get
10 hired. What is she supposed to do with \$105
11 every two weeks? And the system will not
12 release her child until she gets housing.
13 We are caught in a vicious cycle.
14 You have programs like Tenants Action Group,
15 and a contingent of us went up to PHA to
16 protest today, and we're planning a massive
17 protest. We feel as though the Mayor needs to
18 get control of Mr. Carl Greene. How dare he
19 refuse to come here at Council. He acts like
20 he is above reproach, he is above the law. He
21 needs to be brought down to size. He doesn't
22 meet with people. He refuses to meet with
23 people. His staff treats you like you're less
24 than human beings. He has staff in PHA that's
25 making over \$90,000 a year living in PHA

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2 properties. But yet, when I was making
3 \$40,000 a year, I was told that in six months
4 I had to pay my whole rent and my voucher was
5 leaving. Thank God I got laid off in the
6 fifth month, because if I had gotten laid off
7 in the seventh month, here I would be with no
8 income, \$700 a month to pay when I know there
9 are top officials in PHA housing making over
10 \$90,000 a year living in PHA housing. It is
11 absurd. Those houses need to be made
12 available for people to come out of the
13 shelter system and the struggling working
14 class.

15 Councilman Cohen, I just pray that
16 God keeps you well and strong, yourself and
17 Jannie, and I thank all the Councilpeople that
18 have thought enough -- yes, Mr. Rizzo, you're
19 so very handsome. Yes, Councilman Rizzo. And
20 I thank you so much for taking the time to
21 come here. Jannie is an angel, but she is
22 only one Councilperson. There are many seats
23 here, and they are empty and we don't
24 appreciate it. I've seen them running around
25 today. I know they were at work today. But

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2 they forget the small people.

3 We have registered over 2100 new
4 voters out of the low income and the homeless
5 population. We have people who are
6 handicapped, wheelchair bound. There's not
7 enough accessible, affordable housing for
8 those in need.

9 I don't know what it is that is
10 important to the City Council anymore. I
11 understand that we have citizens, that we
12 vote. But it doesn't -- I heard a brother say
13 today, "I'm not going to vote the next time."

14 We went to Harrisburg yesterday to
15 have cuts restored for mental health and drug
16 and alcohol. There were over 2,000 people
17 there. We were not allowed in the State
18 Capital. In the rain, we had to stay out in
19 rain. There is something wrong with this
20 government.

21 So perhaps they want a ground swell.
22 Perhaps they want people to unite and just
23 take to streets and come down here and take
24 over City Council offices or the Mayor's
25 office; we're not above it, we'll do that.

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2 (Applause.)

3 MS. ALI: But if we can sit down
4 like decent human beings and get some resolve
5 to our circumstances, that is what we would
6 prefer. But somebody needs to put a leash on
7 Mr. Greene. He's like a wild dog that will
8 bite and bark. No one has any control over
9 this man. He needs to be stepped to in a
10 major way. He's a human being just like I am.

11 Again, the City has gone outside of
12 Philadelphia and brought in some outsider. We
13 have plenty of talent right here in
14 Philadelphia that can run PHA. So he's
15 putting up these pre-fabs and he's pushing
16 home ownership. Everybody's not trying to
17 have a mortgage. It's one thing when you
18 can't make a Section 8 payment, they will
19 cover your entire rent. But when you can't
20 meet that mortgage, they don't want to hear
21 your sad story. You have a foreclosure and
22 now you have major damage against your credit.

23 So, Councilman, I plead with you, I
24 plead with the other Councilpeople here to
25 please ask the Mayor to get control of Mr.

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2 Greene or get him out of there.

3 A lot people were not going to vote
4 for Mr. Street to get out Carl Greene, but we
5 didn't want Bush in here, so we made sure
6 Street was here. So it was like the lesser
7 evil. But we shouldn't have to go there.

8 So I plead with you, I beg with you,
9 we are willing to work, but we are also
10 willing to do what we need to do in the street
11 like we did the '60s, like we did in the '70s
12 like we did in the '80s when we did the
13 housing takeovers. We are ready to do it in
14 the new millennium because we are sick and
15 tired.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I can tell you
18 that what you promise to do in the future, you
19 may well be called upon to do it, because
20 until government acts more sensitively and
21 more responsibly, the people have to remember
22 it's their government and they have the right
23 to take whatever action is needed to see that
24 that government acts responsibly to everyone,
25 particularly to the needy. They have the

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2 first call upon the government.

3 And I think you're right in your
4 assessment that the Philadelphia Housing
5 Authority is a very bad example of government
6 in action. It breeds cynicism, it breeds
7 contempt, it breeds belief that government is
8 only for rich people and doesn't work for the
9 poor.

10 So Habib Ali, we're delighted that
11 after these number of years your spirit is
12 unscathed. I know that you're going to
13 continue that battle all the way.

14 Councilwoman Blackwell, you're a
15 member of the Executive Board. Do you have
16 any explanation about this change of meeting
17 that several witnesses have raised? Was there
18 any particular reason for the change today?
19 Or was it just a failure, some kind of an
20 error that people were not notified of the
21 change?

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Today, they
23 had a dedication, Mr. Chair, at a senior
24 development, 2500 Jackson Street in Wilson
25 Park. And since they were there already for

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2 the dedication of new properties, they had the
3 Board meeting there. That's all I can tell
4 you. In terms of -- I just know that they had
5 the dedication and so they continued the
6 meeting at the same location and they informed
7 us. I don't know anything about downstairs.

8 MS. ALI: Councilwoman, do you know
9 if the bill was passed today that's going to
10 increase the rents across the board for PHA
11 tenants at that Board meeting?

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I'm
13 checking through the schedule now. I was at
14 another meeting, so I got there late, but I'll
15 tell you in about two seconds.

16 COUNCILMAN COHEN: We think you
17 ought to let the officials know that if every
18 there's a change, that change has to committed
19 to the people in the developments who come to
20 their meetings.

21 Now I'm going to ask for a change of
22 the panel. We thank all of you very much for
23 your assistance.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Mr. Chair,

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2 today, no, nothing happened today with regard
3 to rents. There were 11 resolutions. They
4 talked about rent simplification program or
5 how they can use vouchers and transfer them
6 within programs at the PHA. But there was no
7 resolution today about a rent increase.

8 MS. ALI: Thank you, Councilwoman.

9 Thank you, Councilman.

10 Thank you, Council.

11 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you.

12 Nancy Solandria (ph), who's going to
13 speak to us about the problems of the Disabled
14 in Action and how PHA treats the disabled.

15 Nancy, we'll ask that you be
16 relatively brief, though you have a lot to
17 tell us, I'm sure. And the other two people
18 with her may feel to come and join her.

19 And we want you to know we're very
20 concerned about the treatment of disabled at
21 every level in City Council and particularly
22 among the people that PHA serves. We think
23 PHA has a very special responsibility to
24 provide decent, affordable housing for the
25 disabled.

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2 Why don't you all introduce
3 yourselves, beginning with Nancy first.

4 MS. SOLANDRIA: I'm Nancy Solandria
5 from Disabled in Action of Pennsylvania.

6 COUNCILMAN COHEN: And would you
7 introduce the two gentlemen or have them
8 introduce themselves?

9 MR. SCHROED: My name is Jimmy
10 Schroed (ph) and I'm with Disabled in Action.
11 I've been a housing advocate for many years
12 now.

13 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Very good. And
14 the last gentleman.

15 MR. VON SCHMETTERLING: My name is
16 Eric Von Schmetterling and I'm with Disabled
17 in Action. I'm a past board member of Liberty
18 Resources Center for Independent Living here
19 in Philadelphia, and on a national level I'm a
20 member of Adapt and I live in Philadelphia.
21 I'm a person with a disability and we're here
22 to say that we have not gotten our fair share
23 and that we are a part the population and we
24 don't want any more than our fair share, but
25 we're here to make sure we do get our fair

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2 share.

3 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you.

4 At the end of these witnesses, I'm
5 going to ask the students from the University
6 of Pennsylvania Law School if any of them wish
7 to comment on what they've heard today and
8 what they feel government's responsibility is
9 and how they, as budding young attorneys, can
10 be helpful in the efforts to improve the kind
11 of quality of governmental assistance to
12 people.

13 MS. SOLANDRIA: I just want to say
14 that I agree with what everybody said before
15 us and that 35 percent of the population of
16 this City makes 20,000 or less, so we're a big
17 population; 25 percent of the population is
18 disabled.

19 And the reason that I was first here
20 earlier today was to come to the PHA Board
21 meeting with somebody that I had been working
22 for two years to get a voucher and advocating
23 with him. He's very angry and very upset.
24 And we come and there's no notice, that all of
25 a sudden the Board meeting isn't there and

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2 there's no notice of where it is. So that
3 just was more contempt again for the Housing
4 Authority.

5 I tried to convince that person to
6 come tonight, but he's very frustrated. Our
7 frustration is in, one, in dealing with the
8 voucher system. People are not treated
9 humanely. We're advocates and we'll go with
10 them. But they jump through every hoop that
11 is asked of them. And even when we are given
12 specific vouchers for disabled people, it will
13 take us one to three years for that person to
14 get the voucher simply because of
15 incompetence, of lost files, of change of
16 people that are working with us from PHA. And
17 it is so outrageous for us. People become so
18 frustrated. And things are so difficult for
19 them.

20 My comments are also that I've
21 heard, you know, Mr. Greene say that the
22 Housing Authority is not for the poor anymore,
23 they're more interested in the middle class.
24 There is nowhere left for poor people to go
25 without vouchers and without conventional

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2 housing. And yet it's almost impossible for
3 us to try to get any of these programs. We
4 try to work with people in the City and
5 they're just as frustrated because Mr. Greene
6 will not answer their phone calls either. So
7 we have a situation where no one is getting
8 their needs met in housing. And in a City
9 where people are becoming more frustrated and
10 actually go into shelters and come out and
11 still have no housing. I mean, that's
12 dehumanizing, and it needs to stop. I mean,
13 we have had our issues that we've had to sue
14 the Housing Authority to get more accessible
15 housing and we have won that, but that's an
16 ongoing issue that we always have to be making
17 certain that what's being built is accessible,
18 that's what's being built is affordable.

19 And that's the next question.
20 Things are not affordable for our population
21 of people. And for disabled people, a
22 majority are on a fixed income far, far below
23 poverty level. They're not going to be able
24 to afford most of the what the Housing
25 Authority is building, you have to have

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2 perfect credit. And I don't know a poor
3 person who can have perfect credit to get into
4 these houses. So even though we fight and we
5 might get some more accessible housing, it's
6 not affordable, so that becomes our other
7 issue.

8 So it's, as Habib have said, it's
9 the sheer frustration, and I think we've had
10 enough of it. We're not alone anymore. There
11 are numerous organizations all feeling the
12 same thing. And we are the fourth largest
13 Housing Authority and we all feel that we're
14 one of the worst.

15 There aren't human beings you can
16 talk to -- when I find other housing
17 authorities outside of the City of
18 Philadelphia, it's amazing that there are
19 people there and you actually can call them up
20 and you actually know when you'll get your
21 voucher.

22 For us, I have no idea. There are
23 no time frames for how long it takes to get a
24 criminal check, for how long it takes to get
25 intake, for after intake how long it takes to

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2 actually get your package, after your package
3 how long it takes before you get it inspected.
4 There are no time, so it's just a guessing
5 game and people are left hanging all the time,
6 in domestic abuse situations and in every
7 situation.

8 COUNCILMAN COHEN: There used to be
9 some resident councils that represented
10 tenants in the project. Does that still
11 exist?

12 MS. SOLANDRIA: Apparently it does
13 exist. My only experience with resident
14 councils is when we've gone into neighborhoods
15 to check out the visitability or the
16 accessibility of something, they've come up to
17 us and said, "What are you doing here?" We
18 look like, what do you mean what are we doing
19 here? So that their eyes and ears are
20 checking on what's going on and wanted to know
21 why we were there. And we would explain why
22 we were there and it was more of suspicion
23 than of being interested in what we're
24 fighting for, which is accessible, visitable
25 housing. So that's my only experience with

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2 that.

3 COUNCILMAN COHEN: We will have the
4 other participants give us their information
5 and we'll have questions.

6 Incidentally, Councilman Nutter
7 joined us. He's going to try to join us later
8 on again. But as you know, he's very
9 dedicated and very hard-working and is
10 involved in all sorts of issues on behalf of
11 City Council. But he, like Councilwoman
12 Blackwell and Councilman Rizzo and myself and
13 others, are determined that we're going to
14 work on PHA until the whole thing gets cleared
15 up and it works in the right direction.

16 Sir, go ahead.

17 MR. SCHROED: I was just also
18 answering that the resident council, the
19 people that belong on the PHA resident council
20 not all get paid \$95,000 to be on the resident
21 council and live there, so money buys
22 everything.

23 My name is Jimmy Schroed. I've been
24 working with Disabled in Action. I've been
25 working with people with disabilities who are

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2 homeless since 1996. And in that time, I've
3 seen the City of Philadelphia become colder,
4 more callous and turn its back. Not that the
5 City even had anything to give us in the first
6 place, but now what we get in return has been
7 coldness, more callous treatment and a
8 bureaucracy that feels that it's above
9 everybody else, that it doesn't have to answer
10 to anyone.

11 I was in a meeting with Carl Greene.
12 This was the first time I met him, in 1999; it
13 was August 9, 1999. I'll never forget the
14 date. I came to meet with him to talk about
15 recommendations that the Housing Crisis
16 Committee had for PHA and other top officials
17 in the City of Philadelphia. Around that
18 time, DIA sued the Philadelphia Housing
19 Authority and began to initiate a lawsuit,
20 because out of 70,000-something scattered site
21 units, they only had 28 available that were
22 actually wheelchair accessible for disability.
23 In the middle of this meeting, Carl Greene
24 decided he was going to yell, holler and
25 lecture me for something that I felt he took

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2 this so personally and I couldn't understand
3 it. And I thought we were in the age where
4 people were actually professional and you
5 realized I was suing an institution, not a
6 private person. Well, you thought I was
7 actually suing him personally and this was
8 somehow a slam against him. In that same
9 meeting, however, he would give 30 emergency
10 Section 8 vouchers to the Housing Committee.
11 Since the lawsuit had taken hold and
12 everything, the retaliation we have gotten has
13 been unrelenting day after day after day. It
14 has taken almost now over four years just to
15 give away 30 vouchers to people with
16 disabilities who were already living on the
17 edge in the first place. And in the City of
18 Brotherly Love, that is inexcusable.

19 What really gets me is that in the
20 City of Philadelphia in the year 1776 a bunch
21 of people decided that they were going to
22 sever ties with a country whose tyranny and
23 callousness had robbed people of liberty,
24 justice and any worth of life. And now, in
25 this same City, we are finding that we are

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2 slowly returning back to people who are
3 nothing more than tyrants, a cold and faceless
4 bureaucracy and that the people of Philly, the
5 poorest of the poor, are now being shunned and
6 turned out into the streets, being treated
7 like animals. And then after you've treated
8 them like animals, you're blaming them for
9 even being animals in the first place.

10 (Applause.)

11 MR. SCHROED: And the horror of it
12 all is that it happens here in the place where
13 liberty was born. And now liberty is being
14 smothered in the very same cradle that it was
15 given birth to.

16 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Everything I've
17 experienced with PHA during the course of
18 these extensive hearings indicates that your
19 assessment is very accurate. I would not be
20 able to disagree.

21 Even today, for example, the
22 attorneys for the law firm, one of the most
23 expensive law firms in Philadelphia, that
24 represent PHA -- because the money it spends
25 for things other than the welfare of its

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2 occupants is limitless, it seems. They came
3 to order testimony of this hearing so that in
4 any event they believed that something or
5 somebody misspoke or gave information that was
6 harmful to PHA, PHA could deal, not with the
7 problem represented by the person, but could
8 seek to intimidate.

9 At every stage of these hearings,
10 efforts have been made to intimidate the
11 Chairman of this Committee. I think that's
12 because we're getting very close to the warm
13 body that we have to discover so that we can
14 correct the situation. And every time we get
15 close, like to the terrible things that seem
16 to be happening to the pension system -- of
17 course, we don't know. PHA has had full
18 opportunity to answer, but they try to evade
19 every answer. But instead, they make threats.
20 They threaten to sue our staff members, they
21 threaten to sue me, they threaten everybody in
22 their effort to maintain their total control
23 and secrecy. And I tell you, it won't work.
24 It didn't work in 1776, and it's not going to
25 work in 2000 century.

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2 MS. SOLANDRIA: Thank you very much.

3 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I'm going to
4 enter into the record a number of letters
5 later. Every time it looks as if maybe we're
6 getting close to compelling PHA to meet its
7 Constitutional requirement of being
8 responsible to the people that it serves, PHA
9 comes through with a new threat. I'm going to
10 introduce the letters indicating that into the
11 record so it will be available to everybody to
12 see.

13 I think what happens to ordinary
14 people who have to live in PHA or, for that
15 matter, work for PHA is very important. And
16 PHA's conduct is often -- I can't think of any
17 worse word than to say dreadful. It's
18 absolutely unspeakable. But to see that
19 conduct maintained against the disabled is
20 really unbelievable in this century of
21 civilization, that any agency could be as
22 cold-hearted as PHA is. For them to take this
23 reprisal action against you that you have
24 spoken about because of this lawsuit is an
25 insult to every American procedure.

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2 And you have every reason to be very
3 angry. And keep on fighting because PHA must
4 be brought in line with democratic
5 functioning, or it's got to be replaced, one
6 way or the other. We cannot have a PHA acting
7 in the fashion it does as responsible only for
8 itself, which means responsible to Carl
9 Greene.

10 Do you know that the pension system
11 of PHA, every member of that Pension Board --
12 and it's supposedly worth many, many millions
13 of dollars. Every member of that Pension
14 Board is appointed by Carl Greene. Nobody
15 else has a word to say as to who a member is.
16 Nobody seems to know very much about who, in
17 fact, spends the money of PHA's pension system
18 or in what way it's spent. It keeps that
19 secret. And now it's making the threat I
20 referred to at the earlier part of the session
21 in reducing that. So it's both the workers
22 for PHA as well as those who live on its
23 property that are being very unfairly and
24 unjustly treated. To that end, we're going to
25 continue working.

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2 Sir, you've not been heard from yet.

3 MR. VON SCHMETTERLING: Well, my two
4 colleagues pretty much summed it up. It's
5 just that people with disabilities have always
6 -- you know, we've gotten kind of the short
7 end of stick a lot of times.

8 COUNCILMAN COHEN: It seems to be
9 all time.

10 MR. VON SCHMETTERLING: And we're
11 not going to go away. And Carl Greene may
12 think he can get rid of us or try to fool us
13 or whatever; it's not going to happen. We
14 will stick it through and we will out last
15 him.

16 It could have been that he could
17 have worked with us and we could have, you
18 know, achieved the goals together; but that's
19 really up to him. If he wants to work with
20 us, he's more than welcome to; but it doesn't
21 look like he's willing to do that. And we're
22 not going to go away. That's all.

23 COUNCILMAN COHEN: And the City
24 Council has its own beef with Mr. Greene.
25 Shortly after the testimony by the President

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2 of the Fraternal Order of Housing Police, Carl
3 Greene dismissed the President of that union.
4 He made a very fine statement at a public
5 hearing of this Committee attacking the many
6 excesses and poor judgmental decisions and
7 failures on the part of PHA. He was
8 discharged on a case that the Fraternal Order
9 of Police tells me has no merit whatever.
10 Now, when Carl Greene does that, he is
11 intimidating and seeking to prevent City
12 Council from doing its work. And I have to
13 tell you, as you've told me, that this City
14 Council is never going to cease and desist
15 until Carl Greene either leaves or behaves
16 properly as the leader of an agency that
17 services so many Philadelphians as far as
18 housing is concern and as far as employment.
19 So I think we're all embarked in a joint
20 effort to bring sanity and realistic and sound
21 treatment to Philadelphia citizens.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILMAN COHEN: I want to thank
24 this panel very much and call up a couple of
25 other people.

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2 Any questions from Committee
3 Members?

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I would
5 just like to thank them. We've been
6 struggling through trying to get some
7 effective legislation that would help them
8 City-wide. We've been trying to work with
9 them, trying to get the developers and others
10 to support even more accessible handicapped
11 and to have their needs met.

12 You know, it's our responsibility to
13 keep hope alive and to help people, all of
14 whom who work and/or reside in our City. And
15 so it is our commitment that we're going to
16 stick with it until we can do something. I
17 mean, we work with all the agencies and do
18 what we can in my district to get more
19 housing, more and better, and certainly to try
20 to serve their needs. But certainly with
21 regard to this group and their commitment to
22 help other disabled people, we really are,
23 Councilman, trying to work with them, and we
24 have been for sometime now, to come up with
25 legislation that the City, that the

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2 government, and that developers can support so
3 that we can get it passed.

4 So we thank you always for being
5 there and always for speaking out for people
6 in need. Thank you.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you,
9 Councilwoman.

10 Are there any of these students who
11 wish to be heard?

12 What year are you in the at law
13 school?

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Second year.

15 COUNCILMAN COHEN: We'll give you
16 until your third year to be able to come up,
17 all right? Thank you.

18 Are you both from Liberty Resources?

19 David Cornelson (ph) and Jeffery
20 Toole (ph). Go ahead with your testimony.

21 MR. TOOLE: My name is Jeffrey
22 Toole. I work for Liberty Resources, the
23 Center for Independent Living for
24 Philadelphians with Disabilities. We provide
25 advocacy and support services for people with

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2 disabilities.

3 Liberty Resources helps hundreds of
4 persons with disabilities obtain housing, many
5 through Section 8. Section 8 is not
6 effectively serving people with disabilities.
7 There's a lack of accessible housing and
8 there's no listing for accessible housing.
9 And PHA needs to be accountable to the City
10 and its citizens and all people with
11 disabilities. Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you.

13 MR. CORNELSON: I'm David Cornelson.
14 I'm a service coordinator at Liberty
15 Resources. I'm fairly new to advocacy. I
16 just wanted to give you a little bit of
17 background.

18 Before this, I worked as a social
19 worker discharge planner at Moss Rehab. I had
20 to leave after a period of time because I was
21 in the position of doing discharge plans for
22 people with spinal cord injuries where I was
23 sending them to nursing homes because they
24 didn't have the resources to go to live
25 independently on their own, so I decided that

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2 this really didn't fit the way I felt as far
3 wanting to advocate my -- what we called them
4 there was patients, using the medical model,
5 to be able to live to the highest level of
6 independent functioning that they could. I
7 found that moving to Liberty Resources really
8 met more with my disposition to advocate and
9 to really push for people to live independent
10 lives. What that means is not to be shuffled
11 off to nursing homes, but to live in their own
12 housing with attendant care services.

13 However, finding attendants wasn't
14 really the problem. One of the biggest
15 problems was finding accessible homes for
16 people, and finding, not only accessible, but
17 homes that are affordable. So we have a
18 double problem here of accessibility and
19 affordability.

20 I have been, I guess, somewhat of a
21 privileged person in my lifetime. I became
22 disabled 16 years ago. I had a spinal cord
23 injury myself in an auto accident out in
24 California after leaving Philadelphia. I
25 thought I'd never come back to Philadelphia,

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2 primarily because I found when I came back to
3 visit my family here, Philadelphia was
4 probably one of the most inaccessible places I
5 had found in the United States, mostly because
6 the infrastructure was so old and there
7 probably wasn't the resources to make a lot of
8 changes like there was in California. I've
9 traveled around the world. I've peddled
10 around the world, and I've seen much more
11 accessible cities around the world except for
12 those eastern European countries and a lot
13 poorer countries. I found a lot more
14 accessibility in other countries than I found
15 here.

16 Getting back to the point of
17 accessible housing, however, now I'm in the
18 position of having consumers that are ready to
19 move into positions of being independent.
20 They're hooked up with attendants, but I have
21 people right now that are stuck in living in
22 transitional living facilities and might be
23 there for years before they can move out and
24 live independent lives, truly independent
25 lives, because they cannot get Section 8

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2 vouchers.

3 I have one consumer, for example, in
4 West Philadelphia, he's been waiting for some
5 time now. He's found apartments. He's had
6 people hold the apartments for him, and
7 they've had to give the apartments up to
8 someone else that has the money to pay for
9 them. This person now is 30 years old. He
10 has never been able to live on his own,
11 although he's been ready for sometime,
12 primarily because he cannot find the housing.
13 This is becoming a larger problem.

14 We're at the point right now, we're
15 beginning to have to build a waiting list for
16 these kinds of services. And it's just, I
17 think, unforgivable.

18 I, myself, if I had the opportunity
19 to move back out to California, I would do it
20 on a dime. My family lives here and I've
21 committed to stay here for some time, as
22 difficult as it is. I came back here because
23 my family is here. I would not have come back
24 had I not been able to stand and get around
25 out of my wheelchair a little bit because of

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2 the problems that living in this City presents
3 for me with a disability. You don't see
4 people with disabilities out of the streets
5 very much around here because it's so hard to
6 get around here. You do in California all the
7 time. As a result, people with disabilities
8 on the streets in California are much more
9 normal. It's much more normalized to see
10 people with disabilities. It's not that way
11 here. If I just ask somebody for something
12 around here, they're likely to hold out their
13 hand and try to give me a quarter or a dime
14 rather than respond to what I'm asking.

15 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Mr. Cornelson,
16 could I ask you to meet at some point with my
17 staff in order to get a full picture of, say,
18 the situation in California as compared to
19 Philadelphia so that we can begin the process
20 of specifically trying to follow California's
21 leadership? You know, instead of dealing
22 generally with the subject of California, and
23 try to match and go ahead of them. We need
24 very specific help. Would you be willing to
25 participate with my staff in developing an

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2 immediate program for Philadelphia to adopt?

3 MR. CORNELSON: Absolutely. Yes.

4 Advocacy is something that's new to
5 me. I didn't think that I would be moving in
6 this direction at all when I came back to
7 Philadelphia. When I first came back here,
8 one of my first jobs was commuting by train
9 into Philadelphia. And I started to run into
10 a lot of problems not just with -- housing is
11 new now that I've become an advocate here at
12 Liberty Resources. But I used to get into a
13 lot fights with SEPTA, for example.

14 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Because I think
15 your assessment of Philadelphia is totally
16 accurate. While the Mayor talks about
17 neighborhoods and improving life, he improves
18 life for the rich people. He seems to believe
19 that government exists to make the richer and
20 to do nothing, despite his own background, his
21 own history and activity, he seems to have
22 left that field and instead is concentrating
23 on developing the rich portions. Part of the
24 rebuilding of downtown Philadelphia is to make
25 disabled people invisible, to present

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2 Philadelphia to the outside world as a City
3 where nobody is disabled or nobody is poor so,
4 therefore, you concentrate on rebuilding
5 Center City and forget the neighborhoods. So
6 there's a lot of talk about the neighborhoods,
7 but very little is being done in the
8 neighborhoods and very little is being done,
9 say, for people that are disabled except to
10 try to find some way of pretending they don't
11 exist. And we've got to break through that,
12 make clear that everybody knows they exist,
13 that they have rights and that we've got to
14 help everybody live independently wherever
15 that's possible.

16 So we look forward to your
17 assistance in that program. I suggest you
18 call my office, or before you leave today make
19 sure you see Ellen Berkowitz or Jason Mayland.
20 Make sure you get their phone number and make
21 a date with them to come in and talk and give
22 us a beginning of a program for Disabled in
23 Action.

24 Is there anything else you wish to
25 add?

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2 MR. CORNELSON: Well, I don't want
3 to go on and on. I'll stop with that.

4 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you. I
5 know you could go on for hours because the
6 injustice takes many hours to describe.

7 MR. CORNELSON: Well, I don't want
8 my car to be towed. They've since changed
9 that rule also for the handicapped placards in
10 Pennsylvania.

11 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you very
12 much.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Is there anyone
15 else who wishes to be heard today?

16 We took our program today and we
17 changed it because we think always the needs
18 of people in Philadelphia come first.

19 Come forward to the microphone.
20 Identify yourself, give your name and tell us.

21 MS. BALTIMORE: Hi, my name is
22 Patricia Baltimore. I'm not going to be
23 personal, but I just wanted to say that I've
24 been homeless for five years. I was homeless
25 because I came into -- I went to Germany to

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2 live with my daughter and I changed my mind
3 after a year and a half. Before I left, I was
4 in PHA. What happened is, when I left, they
5 said that I didn't close my house up in the
6 right way, which I did. I went over and gave
7 them all this information. And come to find
8 out when I come back to start over, I'm
9 homeless. What happened is, I was on the
10 waiting list for PHA and for Section 8 and I
11 found out after waiting for two years that I
12 owed a bill for a house that was not closed
13 when I left the country. This was in 1998.

14 The rug has pulled from under me so
15 many times because of my situation from PHA.
16 I've had so many horrible things which, like I
17 said, I will not get personal right now. My
18 thing is, because my problems I had in PHA
19 where I only paid \$62 a month, so how they let
20 a house stay open so long that I now owe -- I
21 found out about three months ago that I now
22 owe \$2,400 after I was paying \$62 a month.
23 The house was supposed to have been closed,
24 but it was not closed. I was put into a
25 shelter and I was told that I would be able to

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2 get Section 8. They were saying the house was
3 open then. I had no jurisdiction over it.
4 But anyway, I went to Section 8 and asked them
5 what was my status. And they told me that I
6 was still on the list but they couldn't give
7 me a time or whatever about where I was on the
8 list. The bottom line is, after waiting three
9 and a half years, they tell me that I'm not
10 even qualified for Section 8 because my house
11 was not closed in 1998 when I went to Germany.

12 And what happened was I filed two
13 lawsuits against OSHA Shelter because they
14 threw away all my belongings which means I
15 cannot proof that my house was closed down
16 legally with me doing whatever I was supposed
17 to do. I crossed my Ts and dotted by Is.

18 It's just been a nightmare and I've
19 been trying to get this PHA situation
20 straightened out. I tried to show my passport
21 or different documents to maybe show that I
22 was not even in the country. Even if I was --
23 which I wasn't, I can prove -- how would they
24 leave a house open? The rent is only \$62.
25 How long did they leave it open for me to have

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2 to owe them that much to get back into PHA.

3 Like \$62 and I owe \$2,400 for a house that was
4 open from -- it still may be open for \$2400.

5 So I just wanted to say that, but
6 I've been through a lot. And like I said,
7 some of them are personal that I maybe can
8 handle myself. Trying to handle.

9 COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you for
10 coming forward and telling us about your
11 problems.

12 Councilwoman Blackwell.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you,
14 Mr. Chair. Certainly, we've not Ms. Baltimore
15 for years; years ago, long before she went to
16 Germany. She was our friend and one of the
17 folks we worked with many, many years ago.
18 And if she'll come back and visit us, we're
19 temporarily in 319 since my office caught
20 fire.

21 MS. BALTIMORE: I was there two days
22 ago. I found you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: So we'll
24 try to work with you to see what we can do to
25 help you.

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2 MS. BALTIMORE: It's been so long.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I guess
4 your kids are grown now, huh?

5 MS. BALTIMORE: Yes, they are; 30
6 and 28.

7 It's like a life sentence because
8 I'm told now that -- because I'm in the
9 shelter now. I've been on and off living on
10 the street, but I thank God he keeps reaching
11 down and grabbing me, because what happened is
12 they want to put me in a boarding home. I'm
13 very highly functional, have a very good
14 education. I am under mental health and
15 diagnosis is major depression. And this
16 definitely doesn't help. It doesn't mean I
17 cannot read and cannot write, but I've been
18 really -- I think you know. Like I said, I'm
19 not being personal because I do have common
20 sense. You understand? But it's been a
21 little tough.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I'll
23 follow-up with our staff. Give us a call
24 tomorrow, Ms. Baltimore.

25 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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2 COUNCILMAN COHEN: The Committee
3 will stand in recess until Thursday, December
4 5th, unless anybody wishes else to be heard
5 who's here who has not spoken yet.

6 It's the first Thursday in December.
7 My staff is in disagreement with each other.
8 One says it's the 4th, the other says it's the
9 5th. Whatever that Thursday is at 5 o'clock
10 this hearing will resume. The current hearing
11 is recessed until that date.

12 The court reporter will note that
13 the first Thursday in December will be
14 December 4th.

15 (Council adjourned at 5:55 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing
proceedings of the Council of the City of
Philadelphia of November 20, 2003, were
reported fully and accurately by me, and that
this is a correct transcript of the same.

RE: COMMITTEE ON LAW AND GOVERNMENT

Lisa C. Bradley, RPR