

**ZONING COMMISSION FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, PUBLIC HEARING ON
CASE NO. 04-33**

STATEMENT OF:

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Good evening, members of the Zoning Commission. Thank you for permitting me to speak with you this evening about the critical need for mandatory inclusionary zoning to assist my clients, survivors of domestic and dating violence. I am Heather Powers, Staff Social Worker at Women Empowered Against Violence, also known as WEAVE. WEAVE works closely with adult and teen survivors of relationship violence and abuse, providing an innovative range of legal, counseling, economic and educational services that leads survivors to utilize their inner and community resources, achieve safety for themselves and their children, and live empowered lives. The proposal before you this evening is critical for low to moderate income families in the District of Columbia and particularly for survivors of domestic violence.

For the past year at WEAVE, I have been providing individual and group counseling to survivors of domestic violence who are trying to transform their lives. At WEAVE my clients come from a wide variety of incomes, neighborhoods, races, religions, and educational levels. What unites them is surviving domestic violence and dealing with the financial trials that come with escaping abusive relationships. Many of us who work in the domestic violence field are asked, "Why do battered women stay?" In D.C. one reason why survivors stay in abusive relationships is the lack of affordable housing.

The story of one of my client's experience illustrates the problem. Please understand that her name and some details have been changed for confidentiality.

Terry lives in an apartment with her abusive spouse and their two boys. After years of intimidation she flees to a temporary shelter. But, she only has four weeks to stay- that means four weeks to find an apartment that she can afford or four weeks to get into a city homeless shelter. She has a high school education and a history of low wage jobs. Every income based apartment complex she calls has a waiting list at least 9 months long. When she visits the place with the shortest list she hears from some of the residents that the apartments won't be around for long- they are being turned into condos. The things her children are learning in the shelter scare her and her kids need new shoes, school supplies, medicines, and other necessities. She hopes to receive a Section 8 Voucher.

Yet, even with a section 8 voucher, there are no guarantees. Many voucher holders who are searching for quality housing are having difficulties finding affordable places in quieter neighborhoods where landlords will accept their vouchers. The only options seem to be with slumlords or in crime ridden areas where any parent would fear for their children's health and safety.

In the life of a domestic violence survivor her abuser often clings to the edges of her life offering apologies, extra money, gifts, and promises that everything will be different if only she returns.

Sometimes a survivor of domestic violence will remain in or return to an abusive relationship to provide higher quality housing for her children. I hope that Terry does not

The proposal before you is especially critical because it not only creates more affordable housing, but it also creates multi-income neighborhoods. Career counselors often say that the best way to get jobs is through people you know. If everyone with whom you have a personal relationship has a low wage job, those are the kinds of jobs with which they can connect you. Within multi-income neighborhoods computer technicians, entrepreneurs, lawyers, artists and/or teachers can live next door to minimum-wage earners. Low income families thus form relationships with professionals with whom they might not otherwise become acquainted, which creates greater employment networks for adults and new role models for children. In my professional experience, families living in multi-income neighborhoods are much more likely to improve their lives than those living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. The lives of some of my former clients have shown this.

Several years ago, as a case manager with Sasha Bruce Youthwork, I worked with Ann, a formerly homeless single mother who moved into an intentionally multi-income development with her two children. And it was beautiful! Ann earned about ten dollars an hour, but she lived next door to people with six-figure incomes. She took so much pride in her home and the quality of her neighborhood. Living in such a beautiful space lifted her spirit and I believe that this spirit is what enabled her to achieve many goals of her goals. By the end of her year with me she had joined an entrepreneurial program to begin saving to open her own business. During

our time together, Ann did not become discouraged or defeated by her neighborhood, unlike some of my other clients who lived in areas of concentrated poverty.

Due to rising costs, today fewer and fewer families are able to reap the benefits of multi-income neighborhoods. Setting aside quality housing for people with low incomes is a good idea. If affordable quality housing were more accessible, more survivors of domestic violence might find the courage to leave. Please make this a possibility.