

District of Columbia Grassroots Empowerment Project (Empower DC)

August 1, 2005

Good Evening Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for the Campaign for Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning proposal – Case # 0433

My name is Linda Leaks and I work with The District of Columbia Grassroots Empowerment Project, a nonprofit also called EmpowerDC I live in Ward One

EmpowerDC is a community-based grassroots organizing project Our mission is to assist low and moderate income residents to overcome the multitude of barriers that MUTE their voices around policies and decisions that directly impact their lives, like the shortage of housing that they can afford

As you have heard time and time again, there is an “affordable housing crisis” for low and moderate income residents of the District of Columbia What I suspect, however, is that you have not heard a lot about, or experienced, either personally or through close acquaintances, is the devastating impact of having to pay more than half of your little income for housing, or having to choose between your housing payment, your medicine or food, or having to double-up or triple-up with family or friends or go into a shelter if you are lucky because there is a waiting list in the District of Columbia for shelters

Because Empower DC is on the ground daily, we are in the neighborhoods daily, we can feel and touch, we can see upfront and up-close, what happens to individuals and families who are threatened with the lack of affordable housing and or displacement; we see the emotional damage, the family dis-integration, we see the psychological hysteria, we see the growing desperation It is real The problem is huge and the impact is equally as detrimental We understand that if you are not personally affected, and if you don’t see the impact first hand, on a daily basis, then you could very easily become DESENSITIZED to the phrase “affordable housing crisis” and not recognize the urgency for a solution

We support Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning, but we clearly recognize that Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning is just one little tool, one small opportunity that is available right now and we urge you to take advantage of it before it is lost

We are particularly supportive of having a lengthy affordability control period We support the Campaign’s recommendations of 20 years for owner-occupied, even though some of our members believe the period should be in perpetuity We support a 50 year affordability restriction on rental, even though some of our members believe it should be in perpetuity as well

Because there is such a large deficit of affordable housing currently, we have lost more than 5,000 units in the last few years, we especially find it critical to have restrictions on the equity sharing at the end of the affordability period so that others who may be in the same boat as the seller was 20 years earlier, can have the same support and opportunity as the seller had

Having a stock of affordable housing for everybody who needs it should be a moral imperative We certainly don’t need any incentive or temptations for speculation.

Commissioners, we want to urge you to hear the plea incorporated in the Campaign’s recommendation of 40% of inclusionary units be made accessible to people whose incomes are 30% of AMI or lower It is this group that is suffering the greatest in today’s affordable housing

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CASE NO. 0433
EXHIBIT NO. 118

crisis It is this group who has been in a perpetual affordable housing crisis since the early 80's
It is this group who has the least options and closest to a state of desperation

Clearly the market won't correct the housing crisis Intervention is the only way
affordable housing will be made available to everyone who needs it

In closing, I want to encourage you to go down into the neighborhoods and talk with the people directly impacted by the "affordable housing crisis" I suggest that you visit the Penacle, at the corner of Benning Road & Maryland Ave , NE, visit the Ivy City Apartments, located at 10th and Mt Olivet Road, NE, visit the few remaining low income residents on 1300 block of Kenyon Street or visiting any expiring section 8 property and talk with the people who are so fearful of losing their affordable housing that they are willing to sign away their constitutional rights to freely associate with other tenants or pick another set of tenants facing displacement, then the phrase, "affordable housing crisis" comes alive