

Keisha Howard – Feb. 23 Testimony
Case No. 14-18A

My name is Ms. Keisha Howard and I am a resident of Brookland Manor. I've lived at Brookland Manor for 16 years.

During my time on the property, I was forced to stay in a one-bedroom for 10 years with my 10 year old, and then in 2010, I was still forced to stay in a one-bedroom apartment with my new born. They didn't move me to a three bedroom until new management took over and my youngest daughter was 6 months old, so new management was helpful in making sure I was in a correct family sized unit.

All these years they've been collecting money but they haven't been maintaining the property the way that they could. Our kids have hardly anywhere to play on the property. We don't have buzzers to buzz people in, but now they want to add these things to make life better, but that's for the new people who are moving in, not for us.

If we were to have a voice in what this new community would look like, we would ask not for green space for dog parks and dog walking, but parks for kids, including ones that can be accessible for children with disabilities, and have a real teen center with mentors, programs and classes, a 24-hour computer lab, a lot of us can't afford internet. Hire people on the property and give us jobs. We have not been consulted with by the developer about what we want our community to look like. So what they're calling a "community benefit" does not match the vision of a "community benefit" for the people who actually live here.

Also, we have to let MidCity go into our bank account and look 10 months into the past into our checking and savings accounts – we have to sign a release form for that. If my mother or my auntie or whoever

sends me money, what does that have to do with Brookland Manor. We are under strict surveillance for being low income. When our kids turn 18 and get a job so they can make some side money, then why does our rent go up? Every time you get something, they want to take it from you. If you're working and trying to stay above water, your rent goes up. That's why a lot of people on the property try to get jobs where they can get paid in cash so that their family's rent doesn't go up. They charge the most for things but trying to go the cheapest route with the paint and materials they use.

And this is a way to split up families because people will put their kids out to make sure their rent doesn't go up. When my own daughter goes off to college, I have to take her off my lease – so why can't I have a space for my daughter when she comes back to visit? They will then use that as an excuse to downsize me to a smaller unit. This is all a way to manage and control our movement and our lives and our families. Why is that? Why is the city prioritizing the needs of the rich over our needs? We need homes too, we have families too, and our interests should be represented.

I feel that they are trying to push black people out of the city. Because even when people have vouchers you have to go all the way to Waldorf, knowing that you still have to have a job in DC. We have white people in our schools that we get along with, and we'd get along with them if they lived with us too. They need to stop thinking that only white people have money. There are people with low income that are black and white that are going through the same thing.

At first with the development MidCity made it seem like it was for us and in our interests, but then I had some friends who were at Edgewood who got put out, which got me suspicious.

If I couldn't stay here because I didn't have a job then I would have to leave because my SSI is taking care of my rent. When they started talking about building town homes especially, because if we could afford houses, we wouldn't be staying here at Brookland Manor – even people who are paying market rent – because this is a place where if you lose your job you don't have to worry about being evicted. If they make it so that we have to pay for water and electricity people really won't have anything. They're talking about bringing in a gym and stuff, and if that's going to have to make us pay for amenities – then that's not what we asked for and so don't bring it.

If MidCity makes a senior building that means families and others can't stay. No one asked for a senior building, so why are they making one? We have some seniors taking care of their grandkids and they should be allowed to live with them and take care of them. There are also seniors with 24 hour nurse care and their nurses need a place to stay with them too.

What this redevelopment means for families is that you'll be homeless and have to take your kids out of school. You have to be in a shelter to get your kids into school, and they are overcrowded. You have families staying in tents, in cars, in a one bedroom inn, and what's that going to do for people who are trying to work? The shelters have time restrictions too that make it so hard for people to go to work and take care of what they need to for their kids. They're saying that they don't care about families. They're trying to segregate the property – even if a person has one child, they shouldn't be forced to stay in a one bedroom. This means they're trying to say that families are causing the destruction of property – but you can't blame that on families.

For my sake, I need to stay in DC because I have two special needs kids who have special needs insurance that only works in DC. If we moved to Maryland we would lose that, and I'm not talking about

Medicaid, because that wouldn't pay for my kid's home nurse, weekly speech, play, and physical therapy. This insurance pays for glasses and surgeries and dentists, and it doesn't have the limitations that Medicaid has.

I've gotten a threat for eviction for being late on my rent for the first time in 16 years. They gave me 11 days to move out for being one month behind. We can't afford our rent in the first place and they tag on \$20 late fees. This does not make any sense. They don't take holidays and things like that in mind, and people are struggling. I can't work a 9-5 job because of the needs that my children have. There are a lot of people on this property that could work at the rental office, me for example, but they hire people from the outside.

Giving me a letter that you promise that I come back doesn't mean anything. Barry Farms residents had letters like that and they were being kicked out the whole time. We need a signed development agreement with penalties for the developer for not complying. We need to know what is the definition of "good standing" because we don't know? What if they're "good standing" means that one time late on rent and you can't come back? We have a list of "rules" but we don't have a list of what "good standing" means so that we can hold the developer accountable too.

We are here to say that zoning should ensure that Mid-City gives us a signed development agreement ensuring that we will be allowed to stay on the property, both during and after the process of redevelopment, without paying new security deposits. Everyone who has been moved around the property has already paid two deposits. Mid-City does not have a definition for what "good standing" means, and they say that we have to be in "good standing" to be able to live at Brookland Manor after the redevelopment.

Councilmembers and politicians do the same thing because they are trying to keep their jobs. They come over here and want to take pictures with the kids and act like they care about the community, but they don't. They already know there's not enough homeless shelters and there are things happening there – people are getting raped, kids are getting abducted, and so on. We don't need more shelters we need family sized homes for low income people black and white families. Families are growing, and there needs to be room for them in this city.

We are in a housing crises in DC. I've been on the section 8 waiting list since 2002 and I still haven't been called. I still have to go down there and every time I hear "yes, you're still on the list, but we don't have anything available." I stay in a place where I could use that section 8 for and they still won't give it to me. That is ridiculous.

We are here to say that zoning should not approve a plan that eliminates family sized units and that eliminates affordable housing. We are in a crisis in D.C. and the last thing the city should be approving is luxury apartments for the rich, when these developers are already making money from providing affordable housing.

That is why I am testifying against the proposal submitted by MidCity. Thank you.