

May 16, 2017

Dear Chairman Mendelson and members of the DC Council,

I am writing to affirm that DC Jobs With Justice supports the *Short-term Rental Regulation and Affordable Housing Protection Act of 2017*. Now is the time to pass sensible and responsible legislation that ensures that our units of housing remain homes for our residents and are not converted into hotel rooms within our neighborhoods and apartment buildings. We believe that the final version of the short-term rental bill should require that residents only host short-term rentals in their primary residence. We also believe that the only way to minimize the temptation to convert housing into fulltime Airbnbs is to keep the vacation days low. Most people have two weeks of vacation per year. As result, we think 15 days is a reasonable cap. The 15 day cap and a primary residence requirement will go a long way toward maintaining the residential character of our neighborhoods.

Airbnb is growing in Washington, DC and as it does, it is changing our neighborhoods and our housing ecosystem. Airbnb is well aware that an unregulated market that allows our homes to turn into hotels – not just for a few nights but indefinitely - is good for their bottom line. As we all know, the cost of housing in DC is outpacing incomes for huge numbers of our neighbors. This impacts the availability and affordability of housing for residents at all income levels, with the most severe need at the lowest income levels.

Many forces lead to this housing situation, and many tools are needed to do our best to protect our housing stock for our residents. For over a decade it has been profitable for owners to replace low and moderate income renters with higher income residents, leading to the unfortunately commonplace tactics of pushing out longtime tenants to increase rents in rent-controlled units, exploiting rent control loopholes, innovation to distort the voluntary agreement process to benefit owners rather than tenants, allowing low-cost properties to fall into disrepair. These are all as ways to flip properties: bringing in higher paying tenants to replace lower-paying ones.

The DC government has taken action to prevent tenants from being exploited given the pressures they face: DC has important rent control protections, the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, affordable housing preservation tools, and funding for programs to build, preserve, and rent housing for low and moderate income residents. Each of these programs is critical and the Council should continue to strengthen them because we have seen that the economic incentive to replace a low or moderate-income renter with a more profitable tenant is very strong. There is a lot of money to be made if you can get

someone to pay more for your unit than the person you have living there now, and many owners are willing to do what it takes to make that happen.

And a new economic force is now impacting the housing landscape in DC. Owners are realizing there is an even more profitable tenant – and it's not a tenant at all, it's a tourist.

It is the DC Council's responsibility to the residents of District to protect our housing as housing. We already have regulations in place that cap the price for many of these units: rent control. And yet, we see in case after case that these units are being transformed from the stable and often moderately priced housing stock they are intended to be into apartments for visiting guests to party and leave. Regulation is needed to curb the market forces that make it so much more profitable to displace residents and operate housing as hotels. We should not allow our homes to be turned into hotel rooms for visitors. I urge the DC Council to pass Bill 22-92, "Short Term Rental Regulation and Affordable Housing Protection Act of 2017" with strict protections around the number of nights the unit can be listed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Falcon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Falcon
Executive Director
DC Jobs With Justice