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Date: January 31th, 2018

Name: Marla Bilonick, Executive Director
Latino Economic Development Center

Subject: Exempting single-family homes from TOPA will accelerate speculation and house flipping at the expense of neighborhood stability, affordable housing, and tenants' economic security

Dear Council Member Bonds and other Members of the District Council

As community-based organizations dedicated to preserving affordable housing, preventing displacement, and making homeownership accessible to lower-income District residents, we are troubled by your decision to introduce a total exemption of single-family homes from the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act. At a time when low-cost rentals are disappearing much more rapidly than they can be built, every housing policy should be evaluated in terms of how it will affect preservation and neighborhood stability. We believe this proposal represents a significant and unnecessary rollback of tenants' rights, and we are concerned that it is being undertaken without sufficient appreciation for its potential impact on the District's supply of affordable housing.

Single-family homes represent a crucial component of the District's stock of rental housing. Thousands of tenants rent single-family homes, including everyone from middle class dual-earner households to low-income families with vouchers. While most new and existing affordable rental housing consists of studios and one-bedroom apartments with a dwindling handful of two-bedrooms, rented single-family homes are a critical source of *family-sized* homes for households with two or more children or multigenerational families. Single-family rental homes are already at risk from a number of factors. Lacking rent control in most cases, tenants can be displaced by unlimited rent hikes. Across the District, developers are acquiring houses through all-cash offers and flipping them or splitting them into multi-unit condos. Displaced tenants struggle to find adequate accommodations in the District. We believe exempting single-family homes from TOPA will accelerate speculation and house flipping at the expense of neighborhood stability, affordable housing, and tenants' economic security.

Over the course of months of negotiations hosted by Councilmember Bonds with representatives from the DC Association of Realtors, we made significant progress in addressing their concerns. Unfortunately, this progress has been discarded in favor of a blanket exemption demanded by the real estate industry. We feel that certain Members of the Council have assumed that abuses of TOPA are the rule rather than the exception, and that they have failed to consider many cases we have presented of clients who were able to buy or assign their rights in order to remain as a tenant in a single-family home due to their TOPA rights.

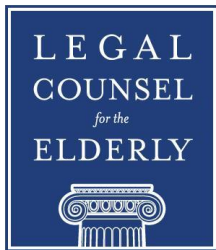


TOPA is one of the District's most successful tools for preserving affordable housing, making homeownership accessible, and maintaining the diversity and dynamism of our neighborhoods. The proposed exemption flies in the face of the District's stated preservation policies and is likely to lead to less affordable housing, less access to homeownership, and more displacement. It is not too late to reverse course on this proposal, and we hope that you and your colleagues will reconsider it.

Sincerely,
SIGNATORIES:



MANNA, Inc



Legal Counsel for the Elderly,



Housing Counseling Services, Inc.
Housing Counseling Services



Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia



Bread for the City



Latino Economic Development Center