
Government of the District of Columbia



Office of the Tenant Advocate

Testimony of

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**PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2014
BUDGET HEARING**

Committee on Business Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
The Honorable Vincent C. Orange, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

Friday, April 26, 2013
10:00 a.m.

Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning, Chairperson Orange and members of the Committee on Business Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. I am Johanna Shreve, the Chief Tenant Advocate of the District of Columbia in the Office of the Tenant Advocate. I am here this morning to present testimony in support of Mayor Gray's Fiscal Year 2014 proposed operating budget for the agency. In February I was here to comment on the agency's steady progress in each area of our mission, and last week we submitted our Annual Report to the Mayor and the Council. As I noted in the Report, the steady progress we are making is not only due to the dedication and collaboration of the entire OTA team, it is also due to the steadfast support of the Mayor, the Council, and the community.

The Mayor's FY 2014 budget proposal

In a nutshell, the Mayor proposes to keep the OTA's FY 2014 operating budget essentially at FY 2013 levels. The agency would maintain its staffing level at fifteen (15) FTEs. The operating budget – consisting entirely of local funds – would increase by \$68,135, or 3.3 percent, from \$2,063,971 to \$2,132,106. This slight change mostly reflects increases in personal services costs and two program enhancements – one for emergency housing (\$35,000) and one to comply with a Court-mandated

communications upgrade (\$4,000) to provide closed captioning at agency events.

By program activity, the proposed change from the approved FY 2013 budget amount is as follows:

- Administrative Services would decrease by \$9,000 from \$424,000 to \$415,000;
- Legal Representation would increase by \$87,000 from \$824,000 to \$912,000;
- Policy Advocacy would increase by \$2,000 from \$123,000 to \$125,000;
- OTA Educational Institute would increase by \$10,000 from \$106,000 to \$116,000;
- Emergency Housing would increase by \$46,000 from \$250,000 to \$296,000; and
- Case Management Administration and Community Outreach would decrease by \$68,000 from \$337,000 to \$269,000.

The OTA organization

The OTA organization now consists of fifteen (15) FTEs. Two (2) new attorney litigator positions were filled in the first quarter of FY 2013. I am extremely pleased with these additions to the agency's litigation team, which significantly enhance the agency's capacity to meet its statutory mandate to provide District tenants with legal representation when it serves the public interest.

The OTA remains a relatively small agency with a huge mandate to serve 350,000 District renters. The additional staff truly translates into exponential growth in terms of the agency's capacity and effectiveness. Given the breadth of our mandate, it has always been necessary for each OTA staffer to assist in more than one mission area. Each additional FTE means that staffers generally may devote that much more time, and make that much greater a difference, in one area of our mission.

Towards that end, our veteran case manager, Delores Anderson, was promoted to the position of Director of the OTA's Tenant Educational Institute at the start of FY 2013. The purpose of this personnel shift is to have a staffer dedicated primarily to advancing the agency's mission in the critical area of education and outreach. The demand for OTA services has grown in all program areas, and it has become imperative to create a position to better meet the ever-increasing demand for OTA education and outreach services. Since the beginning of this fiscal year, the agency has partnered with numerous universities to provide students with important information about their rights and responsibilities as District renters.

Ms. Anderson's promotion means that of the agency's four key mission areas – legal representation; policy advocacy; education and outreach; and emergency housing – three are formally staffed with a single

FTE. This underscores the need for staff – particularly our limited support staff – to share responsibilities in multiple divisions so that the agency can fulfill its broad mandate. Certainly this represents an ongoing challenge for the agency, but it also contributes to a healthy “cross-pollination” between the agency’s divisions. At least up to a point, I believe that this close interplay among all OTA staff well serves the agency and the tenant community.

Emergency housing

I am pleased that the Mayor’s budget includes an enhancement for the emergency housing program. Each year at this time I note how much of the agency’s emergency housing fund remains for the rest of the fiscal year. That number has consistently declined – a trend that continues this year due to the rising demand for this service. As of April 15th, with over five months to go in FY 2013, we have expended \$240,994.46, and the remaining fund balance is only \$9,005.54.

Budget chapter

I note that certain corrections need to be made to the agency’s budget chapter as presented to the Council. The issues include an erroneous grade and salary for one of our staffers, and several program descriptions that could cause confusion. The agency’s budget officer has assured me that the necessary corrections will be incorporated into the June budget book.

Conclusion

Thank you, Chairperson Orange, for this opportunity to testify about the OTA's proposed budget for FY 2014. Thank you and the Committee also for your support of the OTA's mission to protect and promote tenant rights in the District of Columbia. This concludes my testimony and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.