

Testimony of Jean-Michel Giraud, President & CEO,
Friendship Place

before the District of Columbia Committee on Human Services and
Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization

March 1, 2019



Good morning, Members of the Committee and thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify; I am Jean-Michel Giraud, the President & CEO of Friendship Place and a former member of the District's Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Friendship Place is a regional homeless-services provider serving over 3,700 persons with street outreach, hospitality, case management, youth services, medical and psychiatric services, shelter, prevention, rapid rehousing and permanent housing in Washington; and with job placement and veterans services in the greater DC Metropolitan Area. We also have a national reach through best practices.

Friendship Place is a unique blend of public-private partnerships that allows us to have a lasting impact on homelessness by developing practical, permanent solutions. We seek to empower people to rebuild their lives and are working to end homelessness in Washington, DC.

We value our partnership with the City through the Department of Human Services and with the Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness. Within this framework, we would like to offer feedback and suggestions to enhance the service delivery to people experiencing homelessness in Washington.

1. We are pleased to see that the City is unfolding a robust plan to address homelessness. We believe that in order to prevent recidivism we should strengthen our reach in the employment area. Friendship Place uses an Employment First model at AimHire, our job placement program. This model expedites job placements by assuming employability. This approach does not rely on long-term vocational training, which can be time-consuming for a population with urgent needs. Much of the system in the District is based on vocational training, while people experiencing homelessness actually need jobs urgently. We are asking the City to reassess the way it allots resources at the Department of Employment to shift the system toward more rapid and effective job placements. In human services, we focus on outcomes. In this case, the placement is the outcome (the actual goal), the rest of the work – all the classroom training – is merely an output (the activity toward the goal). We believe it would make sense to reorganize the system around this notion. We are not saying that vocational training has no value. We simply believe that the bulk of it is



better received after somebody has become employed and is, therefore, in a better position to focus on learning. We would also like to suggest that the Council look more closely at the way the SNAP employment grant is structured. At this point, service providers are asked to contribute 60% of the total expenses, while the grant covers only 40%. We believe that service providers should not be asked to take on additional financial burden when serving individuals referred by the Department of Human Services. We actually believe that the financial burden should be on the part of the City, given that we are working to empower people to get jobs, therefore helping to reduce the overall costs the system incurs in funding the assistance these individuals receive.

2. Regarding the second round of funding for Permanent Supportive Housing, we have been asked to apply at a new monthly case management rate for individuals that is significantly lower than the rate we have been charging. Our current rate is the result of carefully planned increases over more than ten years of service, which made the program financially viable and has kept up with inflation and standard industry compensation for staff. We have been informed by the Department of Human Services that the decision to adopt a new rate was passed on to the department by the Office of Contracting and Procurement. Although we have applied for a new human care agreement and have decided to embrace the new business model offered by the Department of Human Services, we would like to ask the Council to examine the new rate structure, which will result in significant changes in the service delivery going forward. We would also ask the Council to ensure that all providers are equally compensated so the system remains fair to all, and all providers are operating in the same conditions.
3. In terms of staff credentials, we are grateful to the leadership at DHS for flexing the credentialing requirements for case managers in Permanent Supportive Housing following a meeting with service providers last fall. Recruitment had been challenging at times using the old requirements. Adding the possibility to hire staff who do not hold human services degrees but do have experience in the field and peers (people who have experienced homelessness and have worked in the field but do not hold degrees) has helped us staff up more effectively. It has also opened case management positions to functional professionals, those who come to human services from other disciplines and to peers. Both groups are recognized as important contributors to the field of rehabilitation in the body of work by Dr. William Anthony at Boston University and by the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association. In keeping with this, I would like to recommend that we flex requirements for Program Directors to include Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioners. This certification, which is granted by the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, is now accepted in the credentialing of Qualified Mental Health Professionals in the regulations of a number of states, including Maryland and Virginia. The



Qualified Mental Health Professional is responsible for the clinical oversight of psychiatric rehabilitation programs in these states under Medicaid rules. As we prepare to draw Medicaid funding for Permanent Supportive Housing in the City, adding this category to our regulations would prove beneficial. It would, again, open up recruitment and give greater access to leadership positions to some groups, among them men and people of color, who are not represented proportionally among holders of social work licenses.

4. We would also recommend that the Council work to strengthen the authority of the Executive Director of the Interagency Council on Homelessness and to broaden the mandate of her office so that it can have a greater impact on decisions made about homeless services in the District. This model has produced positive results in other cities in the country.

Again, we would like to commend the City on its tremendous progress toward ending homelessness for all Washingtonians by building systems strong enough to catch people in time, therefore making homelessness in Washington rare, brief and non-recurring.