



71 "O" Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
Tel: (202) 797-8806  
Fax: (202) 797-1867  
Web: www.some.org

**Testimony of Nechama Masliansky**  
**SOME, Inc. (So Others Might Eat)**  
**To the City Council Committee of the Whole**  
**Public Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Support Act of 2009**  
**April 23, 2009**

Good morning, Chairperson Gray and members of the Council. My name is Nechama Masliansky, and I am the Senior Advocacy Advisor at SOME, Inc. (So Others Might Eat). SOME is a nonprofit, interfaith organization that for nearly 40 years has served District residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We provide comprehensive services, including transitional and permanent housing and behavioral health services. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on four matters of concern to our constituents that relate to the FY10 Budget Support Act.

**1. Affordable Housing.** To enable any affordable housing to be available for extremely low-income residents of the District at a time of increased need, we urge that funding for the Local Rent Supplement Program (LRSP) not be reduced through the proposed reduction of \$5.8M in the DC Housing Authority subsidy in FY10. This reduction would send a signal to the financial institutions that partner with developers of affordable housing that there is no assurance of their being repaid.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the LRSP program would “die on the vine.” Instead, we recommend that the LRSP subsidy to DCHA be restored to \$19.4M and in fact be increased.

(a) The \$5.8M proposed to be “borrowed” from FY07 funds should instead be used to support FY10 projects that are “shovel-ready.” This would stabilize the LRSP baseline for next year, use the funds for their intended purposes and get people into housing in FY10. SOME has two projects it already owns that could utilize these funds if they were made available by the Housing Authority.

(b) Overall, the need remains for a \$15M annual increase in LRSP to make possible 1,000 new units a year as recommended by the City’s own task forces. A year ago, the Council approved a modest \$2M increase in LRSP for FY09, but that \$2M was removed in the FY09 budget-gap legislation. At minimum, we urge an increase to LRSP by \$2-3M in FY10. This will enable 166-248 families to be housed and keep the program viable.

**2. Homeless Services.** We recommend a \$2.7M increase to the Department of Human Services’ Homeless Services. This would enable the Department to provide intensified case management to the 200 homeless families in the City’s emergency shelters and help more of those families to develop the capacity to move into permanent supportive housing. The

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<sup>1</sup> The DCHA’s commitment of operating expenses paid through LRSP over a period of years makes possible the financing of affordable, special-needs units. Our residents cannot afford market rates for rent. Their rent contributions produce no net income available for supporting private or public debt. But lenders need to see that the developers will have a steady stream of funds for operating expenses and to pay back their loans. With LRSP, the combination of tenant payments and public rent subsidy produces a steady, predictable stream of project income that can leverage significant private debt.

combination of LRSP-funded housing and case management for these families will go a long way to remove a significant bottleneck in the City's emergency shelter system.

**3. Food Coordination.** One in eight District residents struggles with hunger. Programs and funding related to increasing access of residents to food, to maximizing buying power, and to enhancing nutrition knowledge are scattered across at least 12 District agencies. Even before the current economic downturn, there was a need for greater inter-agency cooperation to ensure that agencies, non-profit service providers, small businesses, and low-income residents capitalize on the federal and local resources available to them. Today's fiscal realities underscore the need for better coordination. We therefore recommend that at least part of a staff position in the Mayor's office be dedicated to working on food issues, with input from the Mayor's Commission on Food and Nutrition. This would provide an impetus and a mechanism for coordination of food-related District activities and funding, which will in turn increase utilization of federal funds and provide the opportunity for evaluating health, poverty, hunger, and economic outcomes across agencies.

**4. Department of Mental Health transition-- targets and timelines.** The closing of the DC Community Services Agency (DC CSA) is under way. It holds the promise of more accountability and higher quality, expanded mental health services for those on the DC HealthCare Alliance, and integration of mental health and primary care. The groundwork, however, must be laid for such an expansion, with specified tasks. These include revising existing regulations, considering the relationships between DMH, DHCF and the MCOs, and revisiting the rate structure for clinical services.

The FY10 Budget Support Act should hold DMH accountable to these promises and these tasks by requiring the agency to adhere to specific timelines for each task involved in laying the groundwork and by requiring submission of reports to City Council on its progress. A year from now we will have a more precise understanding of how much will have been saved by the closing of DC CSA, and we will want to be ready to implement the next phase of improvement of our mental health system.

Thank you for your ongoing support of services for the District's most vulnerable residents, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I want to add, on the record, our sincere appreciation for the steps you have been taking to make the budget process more transparent and more open to all members of the public.

