**Government of the District of Columbia**

**Office of the Tenant Advocate**

Testimony of

**Johanna Shreve**
Chief Tenant Advocate

**Public Hearing on:**

**Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 OTA Budget**

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Housing
The Honorable Robert C. White, Jr., Chairperson

Wednesday, June 4, 2025
12:00 p.m.

John A. Wilson Building, Room 500
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

***Introduction***

Good afternoon, Chairperson White and members of the Committee on Housing. I am Johanna Shreve, the District's Chief Tenant Advocate and Director of the Office of the Tenant Advocate (OTA). I am here today to discuss the Mayor's proposed Fiscal Year 2026 (FY 26) budget for the OTA, and the impact it will have on agency operations.

First, however, I want to acknowledge the difficult position that the Mayor was in when formulating her FY 26 budget proposal, given the uncertainty caused by Congress and hits to projected revenue in the coming years. I am grateful that her FY 26 budget proposal will allow those of us at the OTA to continue doing our important work for District renters.

***Status of the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget***

I will begin with the status of the Fiscal Year 2025 (FY 25) budget. Going into the start of the fiscal year, the FY 25 approved budget totaled $4,175,757. Last month, the Executive swept $163,247 from that budget as a part of its effort to deal with the substantial mid-year federal budget cut. The FY 25 funds swept by the executive represent two vacant attorney positions – one being an existing attorney position vacated in April, and the other being a new litigating attorney position.

Of the remaining $4,012,510 in the FY 25 budget, the agency has spent $2,895,557 (73 percent). The remaining balance is $1,114,549. Of that amount, $1,017,118 is for personnel services (PS), and the remaining $97,430 is for non-personnel services (NPS).

*Continual Spending Pressure*: *Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP)*

Virtually every year, the demand for the EHAP program exceeds the appropriation, necessitating an intra-District transfer of funds to close the mid-year funding gap. As of today, the agency has spent $621,512 – which is $51,512 in excess of the $570,000 appropriation for FY 25. Per the Mayor's approval of a transfer of funds, the agency is awaiting the infusion of $250,000 to carry us through the remainder of FY 25. Taking into account the $51,512 deficit to date, this will leave $198,488 for the remainder of FY 25.

*FY 25 NPS Spending Update: Tenant Summit*

One of the agency's significant NPS line items is $75,000 for the Tenant Summit. I am pleased to report that on Saturday, September 13th, 2025, the OTA will hold the first in-person Tenant Summit since before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

***Fiscal Year 2026 Proposed Budget***

For FY 26, the Mayor proposes a budget of $4,191,188 for the OTA. This represents a 0.4 percent increase over the approved FY 25 amount. Adjustments from the FY 25 approved budget are as follows:

*Increases*

1. *Westlaw:* An increase of $12,000 for our subscription to Westlaw legal research services.

2. *Amazon Connect:* An increase of $2,500 for the Amazon Connect phone intake system.

3. *IT equipment:* An increase of $10,000 for additional features for the phone intake system.

4. *Adobe subscription, printing, advertising:* An increase of $45,511 for Adobe, as well as printing and advertising.

5. *Local Travel:* An increase of $2,500 for fuel and other costs associated with local travel.

6. *Court filing fees:* An increase of $2,000 for court filing fees.

7. *Miscellaneous office costs:* An increase of $20,000 for office supplies, printing services, translation, and interpretation.

8. *Fringe for all employees:* An increase of $15,014 for fringe benefits across the agency.

*Decreases*

1. *Translation, interpretation, IT equipment:* A decrease of $27,753 for translation, interpretation, and IT equipment. Please note, however, that funding for these purposes is restored elsewhere in the OTA budget (see above).

2. *Transfer of partial OCFO position:* A reduction of $48,120 and 0.3 FTE, representing a budget analyst position within the OCFO that the OTA will no longer partially fund. I am assured that this cut does not entail a reduction in services.

3. *Step increases:* A reduction of $24,887 in Local funds and $1,584 in SPR funds for step increases (totaling $26,471).

*Shift*

1. *Position shift from SPR to Local:* A shift of $109,866 and one FTE, representing an Education and Outreach position, from SPR to Local Funds.

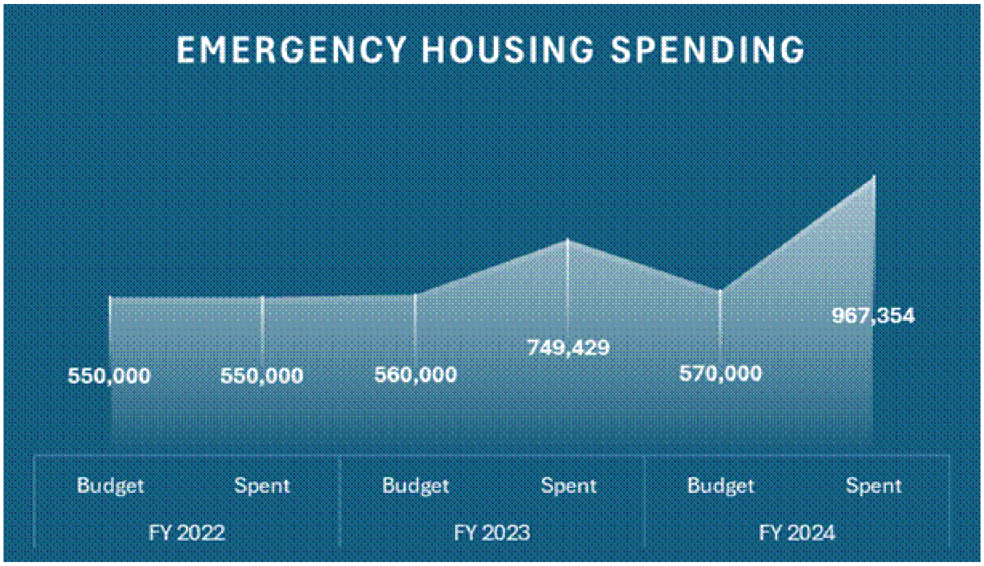
I will also note that the FY 26 budget proposal restores the funding for both vacant attorney positions, which – as I discussed earlier – were swept from the FY 25 budget. We have identified candidates to fill those positions, and we plan to make those hires as soon as possible in the new fiscal year.

***OTA Budget Requests***

I have two requests for you, Mr. Chairperson and the Committee, regarding the agency's FY 26 budget. These relate to (1) EHAP funding and (2) court filing fees, respectively.

1. EHAP funding enhancement:

As I discussed earlier in my testimony, without a mid-year infusion virtually each year, the agency would run out of funds and would be unable to continue the EHAP program for the remainder of the fiscal year. To avoid repeating this cycle over and over again, I would request that the Committee fund EHAP at $760,000 for FY 26 if possible and in future years. This number is the *average* amount, rounded up, that the agency ultimately ***spent*** on EHAP in each of Fiscal Years 22, 23, and 24. The chart printed in my written statement shows the EHAP approved budget amount and actual expenditures for FY 22 though FY 24.




*EHAP reimbursement*

In related good news, I can report that the owner of a property who we deemed liable for our EHAP expenditures – 1433 Columbia Road NW – has agreed to reimburse the entire amount of the agency's EHAP expenditures ($260,299) to provide emergency housing to tenants displaced from the property starting toward the end of FY 24 and continuing into the start of FY 25. I am pleased that this success may come without our having to initiate a formal adversarial action. I believe this is a good indicator of future success for the agency's reimbursement program.

2. Budget increase for court filing fees:

With the hiring of a new litigating attorney at the start of the fiscal year, I anticipate an increase in the agency's litigation activity in FY 26. Accordingly, I anticipate the agency needing more funding to cover filing fees and other litigation costs in the next fiscal year than the $2,000 included in the Mayor's proposal.  I would ask the Committee to shift to the agency's litigation line-item $8,000 of the $10,000 that the Mayor proposes for computers and laptops, which the agency is unlikely to purchase within the coming year.

***Conclusion***

Thank you again, Chairperson White and members of the Committee. This concludes my testimony.  I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.