

---

**Government of the District of Columbia**



**Office of the Tenant Advocate**

Testimony of

**Johanna Shreve**  
Chief Tenant Advocate

**PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2015  
BUDGET HEARING**

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

Monday, May 5, 2014  
10:00 a.m.

Room 500  
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 2015 proposed operating budget for the agency. In February, I spoke about the agency's progress, and its goals and challenges, in each of our mission areas. At the outset, I wish to thank the Mayor, this Committee, the Council, and the community for supporting the work of this agency.

**The Mayor's FY 2015 budget proposal**

In a nutshell, the Mayor proposes to increase the OTA's FY 2015 operating budget by \$260,000 or 12.2 percent to help meet the increasing demand for emergency housing assistance. The operating budget – consisting entirely of local funds – would increase from approximately \$2,132,000 to approximately \$2,392,000. The agency would maintain its staffing level at fifteen (15) FTEs.

By program activity, the proposed changes from the approved FY 2014 budget amounts are as follows:

- Administrative Services would increase by approximately \$15,000 from \$415,000 to \$430,000;

- Legal Representation would decrease by \$12,000 from \$912,000 to \$900,000;
- Policy Advocacy would remain at a funding level of \$125,000;
- The OTA Educational Institute would decrease by \$1,000 from \$116,000 to \$115,000;
- Emergency Housing would increase by \$250,000 from \$296,000 to \$546,000; and
- Case Management Administration and Community Outreach would increase by \$7,000 from \$269,000 to \$276,000.

### **The OTA organization**

The agency's programmatic divisions reflect our four key mission areas: (1) outreach and education about tenant rights; (2) legal assistance; (3) policy advocacy; and (4) emergency housing assistance. A team of fifteen (15) FTEs provides this broad scope of services to a District-wide constituency of approximately 350,000 renters, and climbing. Three (3) of the four (4) programmatic areas are formally staffed with a single FTE. Thus it is imperative that the staff remains nimble and able to "juggle" tasks as necessary when help is needed in multiple mission areas. Thus each new FTE enhances the agency's capacity and effectiveness exponentially. Each is an additional resource, which in turn helps the agency reduce the "juggler effect."

We currently have one (1) vacant FTE position which will be filled by the end of the fiscal year.

**Emergency housing**

I am particularly pleased that the Mayor's budget proposal includes a \$250,000 enhancement for the emergency housing assistance program. Historically, the agency has exhausted its funding for the program by the end of April. This year funding was exhausted by the end of March. That is not surprising given that the current fiscal year began with a bang. As of October 1, 2013, the agency was already dealing with a major government closure, and with the need to provide assistance to 43 individuals in 14 families. They included a widowed father with seven (7) children, and two other families with five (5) children each. Due to extenuating circumstances, the agency housed two of the families in hotels for 75 days.

This particular closure occurred during a period of spending restrictions due to federal budget sequestration. Thus it was necessary to secure the approval of the Mayor's office in order to help these families. We thank the Mayor's office for acknowledging the importance of doing so, and -- as reflected in the FY 2015 budget -- the importance of the program. As of April 30, 2014, the agency has handled seven (7) government building closures, assisting a total of 28 families. Since FY 2014 program funding

was exhausted as of the end of March, we have continued to operate the program with a reprogramming from a sister agency.

**Conclusion**

Thank you, Chairperson Orange, for this opportunity to testify about the OTA's proposed budget for FY 2015. Thank you and the Committee also for your support of the OTA's mission to protect and promote tenant rights and affordable housing in the District of Columbia. This concludes my testimony and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.