

Testimony to the District of Columbia Tax Revision Commission to Support Progressive Taxation

Submitted by Orelia Busch - MSW Candidate, National Catholic School of Social Service

November 12, 2013

I am a resident of the District of Columbia, and I live in Ward 5. I am also studying for my Masters of Social Work at the Catholic University of America. For the past year and a half, I have worked as a social work intern with poor and low-income families and individuals in Washington, D.C. I plan to practice social work in the District of Columbia when I graduate in May of 2014.

As a District of Columbia resident, I strongly support creating new income tax brackets for high income earners. Low-income residents of Washington, D.C. have enough hurdles to contend with in finding safe, affordable housing, and jobs that will pay them a living wage. Those who can afford higher tax brackets should pay their fair share, and income taxes should never unduly burden working people who are struggling to make ends meet.

I urge you to follow recommendations to create new tax brackets for high income earners. I also ask that you keep Schedule H, The DC Homeowner and Rental Property Tax Credit, intact. This credit helps those overburdened by high rents and property taxes stay in their homes and support themselves and their families. Rent and property values in many areas of the District of Columbia, especially in my neighborhood near H Street Northeast, have increased dramatically in recent years. Meanwhile, half of the District of Columbia's affordable housing has disappeared in the last decade. Nobody should have to pay more than 30% of their income towards housing, and yet this is all too often the case. Schedule H helps District of Columbia residents at all income levels keep and afford their housing.

Finally, I ask you to increase the Earned Income Tax credit for childless workers and to increase the standard deduction and personal exemption. These increases will help some of the people I serve, particularly those who are homeless and working or at risk of losing their housing, save money to gain and keep affordable housing. The Earned Income Tax Credit has been an important lifeline to families with dependents. I have worked with many single or childless individuals who have very little support and have spent a year or longer living in emergency shelter because they did not have the assets or adequate employment to obtain permanent housing. These individuals should be able to benefit from the same opportunities offered to low income families. The standard deduction is claimed more often by low and middle-income workers than by those earning high incomes. Bringing the standard deduction and personal exemption in line with the amounts provided by the federal government are simple forms of tax relief that benefit everyone, especially those who earn less money.

I regret that I cannot attend the hearing in person, and I respectfully submit my request for this commission to create new tax brackets for high income earners, keep schedule H intact, increase the standard deduction and personal exemption to the federal levels, and increase the Earned Income Tax Credit for childless workers. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.