

Testimony of  
Sharon Levin, Director of Major Events and Policy Advocacy,  
Washington Area Women's Foundation  
Before the Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs of the Council of the District of  
Columbia  
Thursday, January 17, 2008

Councilmember Barry and other Members of the Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs:

My name is Sharon Levin and I am the Director of Major Events and Policy Advocacy of Washington Area Women's Foundation. I have submitted an expanded version of this testimony to be submitted for the record.

Thank you for holding this Roundtable that focuses on partnerships as a strategy to address poverty in our City. This concept is at the very core of The Women's Foundation's work.

Washington Area Women's Foundation was founded 10 years ago with the mission of building stronger communities in our region by investing in the power of women and girls. We have helped improve the lives of more than 100,000 women and girls in the Greater D.C. Area. We have also invested in over 100 regional non-profit organizations. I am thrilled that so many of our Grantee Partners have been able to testify at this Roundtable.

Our signature program is the Stepping Stones Initiative – a 10 year regional initiative to help build the economic security and financial independence of low-income, women-headed families.

Since Stepping Stones was launched in 2005, it has provided nearly 10,000 direct services to low-income women, including job training, counseling and support; as well as financial counseling and education. In doing so, it has helped improve the lives and prospects of thousands of low-income women and their families.

Partnerships are at the top of our Stepping Stones agenda. Through partnerships with businesses, philanthropists, service providers and others we have created a results oriented project that is already having an impressive impact.

We also recognize the importance of public-private partnerships in creating wealth building opportunities for low-income women. Through our work, we have identified several steps that the DC Government can take to reduce poverty among low-income women:

We were very proud to have supported the efforts to pass the Living Wage Law – and we would like to take this opportunity, Councilmember Barry, to thank you for your vote. However, it is generally understood that the education and monitoring of

employers has yet to begin. Without proper implementation and enforcement, there is no guarantee that working low-income women will fully benefit from the passage of this law – which could ultimately increase their assets by \$7.5 million.

Many low-income women in the District face an impossible choice – providing for their children financially or caring for them throughout the day because of a lack of accessible and affordable child care. Ultimately, this is one of the greatest impediments to women being able to pull themselves out of poverty. We urge you to invest in quality, affordable child care so that working mothers no longer have to face this choice

Low-income women have not been able to take advantage of the economic boom in the District which has created many high-paying jobs that could allow these women to become self-sufficient. The D.C. Council must invest in Workforce Development -- particularly those programs that give low-income women the tools to move into higher-paying jobs.

We are very proud that Stepping Stones is helping low-income women become first time home owners. However, we believe that a careful review of the long-term resale restrictions for low-income homeowners who benefit from inclusionary zoning must be carefully reviewed.

There must be greater protections for low-income D.C. residents from predatory lenders. The City took a tremendous step forward in this area when it passed the Payday Loan Consumer Protection Amendment Act. We urge the Council to insure that this law is vigorously enforced.

By working together, the DC government, corporations, non-profit service providers and funders can create the partnerships that will give low-income women the resources to provide for themselves and their families. That will build a stronger D.C. for all of us. Thank you.