



District of Columbia Government
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A
Box 75115
Washington, DC 20013



November 13, 2020

Mayor Muriel Bowser (via email)
DGS Director Keith Anderson (via email)
DHS Director Laura Zeilinger (via email)

Re: ANC6A Support for Apartment Style Housing for Unhoused Individuals and Concerns Regarding Planned Hypothermia Shelters at DC Recreation Centers

Dear Mayor Bowser, Director Anderson and Director Zeilinger:

At a regularly scheduled and properly noticed meeting¹ on November 12, 2020, our Commission voted 6-0-1 (with 5 Commissioners required for a quorum) to write to urge you to seek safe apartment or hotel room style housing for the unhoused during the 2020 hypothermia season.

Our Commission is gravely concerned that the proposal put forward by DHS and DGS is likely to create ongoing super-spreader events among this vulnerable population and the staff that serve them. We have seen great leadership from the Mayor and the Department of Health to help limit the spread of COVID-19 to date and we expect better planning from our local government. We do not consent to placing 60 women inside a single facility without separate rooms and we strongly urge you to seek safer and more humane accommodations for these at-risk residents.

Our Commission does not believe it is humane to ask residents to sleep on basketball court floors in Recreation Centers under normal conditions and reiterates our strong recommendation that the District do more to increase affordable housing, shelter units, and other options to serve the unhoused in a more respectful and permanent manner. Furthermore, we are extremely concerned that our government has proposed housing as many as 60 individuals in these types of conditions during the ongoing pandemic. It is unquestionably unsafe to place 60 people inside a single open-air facility at this time. No doubt, this is why the Mayor's Order restricts gatherings to fewer than 50 people during the pandemic. Your proposal to do so seemingly violates the Mayor's Order² and commonsense. See strongly urges the District government to seek every available opportunity to provide apartment-style or hotel room housing to the unhoused residents this winter.

Should the government reject our recommendation to provide apartment-style or hotel room housing, we strongly urge the following conditions for a minimum prerequisite to any use of our Recreation Centers to house numerous residents during hypothermia season.

¹ ANC 6A meetings are advertised electronically on the anc6a-announce@yahoo.com, anc-6a@yahoo.com, and newhilleast@groups.io, at www.anc6a.org, on Twitter (@ANC6A) and through print advertisements in the Hill Rag.

²

https://coronavirus.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/coronavirus/publication/attachments/COVID-19_DC_Health_Guidance_for_Mass_Gatherings_2020.07.29.FINAL_.pdf



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First, the Commission requests that any plans to use facilities within our bounds be fully vetted by career public health staff at the Department of Health to ensure that maximum capacity, socially distancing, airflow, and other key health requirements for gatherings during the pandemic are fully considered from a public health and safety perspective by experts in this area.

Second, the District should ensure that any such Recreation Centers have adequately upgraded their HVAC units to allow for improved filtering of airflow. The District is in the process of doing for its public schools prior to returning a small number of children to classrooms. Our unhoused residents deserve similar protections if they are going to be brought inside and congregated for extended periods of time with other non family members. The Commission strongly urges that any Recreation Centers that are used to house groups of individuals this winter have HVAC upgrades and improved airflow to meet or exceed those being provided throughout D.C. Public Schools, including MERV-14 and HEPA filters.

Third, the District should respect the need for social distancing to combat the pandemic and protect the safety of its residents by substantially reducing capacity below levels used in prior years. Last year, DHS placed 30 beds inside Sherwood Recreation Center on hypothermia alert nights. Given the complications involved in social distancing during the pandemic and the particularized importance of social distancing during extended time indoors with non family members, the Commission urges the DHS to reduce capacity to no greater than 50 percent of the number of residents who used the facility last year. As District schools are considering reopening, they are all proposing to operate as substantially reduced capacities during the pandemic. The vulnerable residents that DHS serves during hypothermia season and those who serve them and otherwise come into close contact with them, deserve no less.

Thank you for providing great weight and due consideration to the Commission's concerns regarding how to accommodate the unhoused and our recommendations regarding safe accommodations and the use of District facilities and resources this winter.

Should you wish to discuss this letter with the Commission, please feel free to reach out to me at AmberANC6A@gmail.com, Vice Chair Toomajian at PhilANC6A@gmail.com or Commissioner Brown at DCANC6A01@gmail.com. We look forward to your response and hearing how you have reviewed and afforded great weight to the views of the Commission.

On behalf of the Commission,

Amber Gove
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A



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CC:

Chairman Mendelson
Councilmember Brianne Nadeau
Councilmember Charles Allen