

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs



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Testimony of
Ernest Chrappah
Acting Director

Before the
Committee of the Whole
Phil Mendelson, Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia

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Room 120
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee, and staff. I am Ernest Chrappah, the Acting Director of the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA). I am excited to have the opportunity to testify before you as you consider my nomination for permanent Director of DCRA.

It has been an honor to serve the Government of the District of Columbia in various roles for the past 10 years, and I was deeply humbled when Mayor Bowser placed her trust in me on February 5, 2019 by naming me the Acting Director of DCRA. I have enjoyed the challenges and rewards of government service, and I share the Mayor's commitment to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the District Government. I look forward to, if confirmed, many more years of service to District residents and carrying out the mission of bringing transformative improvements in government services to residents in all eight wards.

My educational background and professional experience make me uniquely qualified to transform the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs. I earned a Master of Business Administration with a focus in Strategy and Marketing from the University of Maryland, Robert H. Smith School of Business and my Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the American University.

I have 19 combined years of professional experience across both the private and public sectors. The last 10 years have been focused on serving District residents and businesses through several leadership roles as the Director of the Department of For-Hire Vehicles (DFHV), Chief of Operations at the DC Taxicab Commission (DCTC), Deputy Chief Information Officer at the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), Director of Fiscal Management for the Special Education Transportation Division at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), and Program Manager with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO). In all the

positions I have held, the common thread is a history of delivering results and earning a reputation for applying innovation to solve complex problems.

During each of the last four calendar years as a public servant, I have been recognized through multiple awards as a direct result of the support of Mayor Bowser and the hard work of dedicated District employees and the Council. In 2016, I was a finalist for DC Top 50 Innovators awards from American Inno. In 2017, I received the International Regulator of the Year award from the International Association of Transportation Regulators. In 2018, I was recognized by the Greater Washington Clean Cities Coalition for being a Transportation trailblazer. In 2019, a project I led was recognized by Smart Cities Connect for transitioning for-hire vehicles to an all-digital platform. The award honored the 50 most transformative smart projects across the globe.

During my time as Director of the Department of For-Hire Vehicles (DFHV), we transitioned from the D.C. Taxicab Commission (DCTC) into DFHV with an expanded mandate to regulate ride hailing companies and transformed the agency and industry in less than 24 months through innovative programs to reduce transportation barriers for veterans, children in foster care, seniors, people with disabilities, and government employees. The underpinning to turning around the reputation of the agency was a digital platform to authenticate and monitor for-hire vehicles, drivers, and analytics for data-driven policymaking and completing a major overhaul of the original taxicab equipment rules, replacing legacy meters with state-of-the-art equipment that allows drivers to choose from multiple apps and compete in the digital age.

My work as the Deputy Chief Information Officer at the DC Child and Family Services Agency also highlights how to implement a people-centered digital transformation to enhance operational efficiency and improve outcomes for residents. At CFSA, I led the effort to implement mobile apps for foster parents and social workers. For the first time in the agency's history, social

workers had real-time access to case files from a smartphone, could document notes from the field, receive notifications on dashboards, and use GPS turn-by-turn directions for home visits- from a phablet or smartphone at their fingertips. This effort helped social workers save time, stay safe, and engage with families. I also previously served as a Program Manager with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer overseeing IT initiatives for multiple District agencies. At OCTO, I was part of a team that won the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) 2008 award for innovation in the IT project management category. These experiences have prepared me to address the operational and cultural challenges facing DCRA during this time of rapid innovation and explosive growth across the District.

Under Mayor Bowser's administration, DCRA has made enormous strides in protecting the health and safety of the District's residents, putting a laser-focus on consumer protection and preserving affordable housing, while encouraging safe and green construction practices are implemented in every ward.

After taking the helm as Interim Director in mid-November, I completed over 45 listening sessions with DCRA staff and external stakeholders including tenant advocates, children's advocates, ANCs, the D.C. Building Industry Association (DCBIA), the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the Apartment and Office Building Association (AOBA), Councilmembers, and sister agencies to gather invaluable feedback, ideas, and concerns about the agency. Some of the key concerns discussed include inconsistent policies and procedures, lack or slow response to customer inquiries and requests, availability of DCRA records online with download and printing capabilities, performance data transparency, and qualification and training of staff. As a result of these discussions, several areas of improvement were implemented, agency processes were assessed, and 23 standard operating procedures (SOPs) were identified to develop and update. To

date, I am proud to share that 19 SOPs have been evaluated, developed, and completely updated; SOPs ensure consistent application of policies and procedures throughout the agency.

To address the responsiveness of customer service, we launched a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) framework to streamline how we communicate and address customer inquiries. CRM is a single point of contact for the customer, synchronize every touch with a customer, and allow DCRA to efficiently address customer concerns and enable matters to be seamlessly elevated to management when necessary. We also identified and assessed the nature and extent of issues that were degrading customer service and creating backlogs in the permits, inspections, and enforcement divisions and established baselines in order to measure future improvements and provide transparency to our customers. There was a backlog of enforcement actions totaling over 1,000 Notices of Infractions. Steps we took to clear the backlog include, correcting underlying notice of violations that were defective, tracking the Notices of Infractions on a dashboard and etc. That backlog has been reduced to 151, and we expect it will be cleared by the end of May. Additionally, the Vacant Building Enforcement team eradicated a backlog of more than 900 vacant and blighted appeal decisions. We did so by refocusing our efforts on delivering quality customer service and prioritizing the staff work to clear the backlogs. We assessed the processes and now have SOPs in place to prevent this sort of backlog from happening again.

To address other key concerns mentioned above by the stakeholders and staff and fulfilling the objective to better serve the public and the industry, I am proud that we have accomplished many tasks over the last six months that I have led the department. This includes:

- Launched a beta public data dashboard to improve agency transparency by providing visibility into agency performance metrics, service levels, and workload;

- Established two working groups to elicit feedback for regulatory reform and improvements to compliance and enforcement programs;
- Relunched a pilot database to provide public access to electronic records, including permit applications and approved plans; and
- Deployed an eLearning platform to provide self-paced online training for Employees.

To meet and exceed our customer expectations, we are embarking on a digital transformation at DCRA, *Vision 2020: A Roadmap to Digital Transformation (Vision 2020)* — this represents a fundamental change in processes and activities, and how we communicate and provide information to customers. *Vision 2020* will simplify and streamline how residents can activate DCRA as the agency carries out its mission to protect consumers and ensure code-compliance.

Vision 2020 is a six-prong strategic approach to transform DCRA and sustain dramatic operational improvements during Mayor Bowser’s second term. *Vision 2020* will elevate the agency to achieve peak performance by examining and efficiently allocating the budget, instituting regulatory reform, streamlining communication efforts, enhancing staff training, implementing process improvements, and introducing technology improvements. The cumulative effect of these policies will be a nimble agency operating at peak performance that is able to efficiently and effectively serve residents, protect consumers, license businesses, and ensure code-compliance.

To this end, the agency is implementing a series of pilot projects to deliver on the promise of *Vision 2020*. These projects include streamlining its housing code compliance and enforcement activities by issuing a Notice of Infraction (NOI), instead of a Notice of Violation (NOV), whenever a housing code violation is not addressed by a housing provider; inspectors using mobile

tablets to access a housing provider's violation history, review relevant data, and submit inspection reports from the field; rental housing providers receiving electronic alerts for housing code violations; and a map visualization of housing code violations throughout the city available on the DCRA Dashboard. Other projects include on-demand professional inspections; establishing a rating system for design professionals, general contractors, and home improvement contractors; exploring a lower-cost alternative to Velocity expedited permit reviews; and aggressive enforcement actions, within the scope of our legal authority, against developers performing illegal construction or violating stop work orders.

I intend to approach each challenge determined to seek solutions with results meant to serve customers' best interests and meet the public's demand for quality service and ensuring code-compliant conditions throughout the District.

Ultimately, our initiatives, programs, and policies are intended to expand economic opportunities, solve problems for our customers, and foster innovation in support of our ambitious vision to efficiently provide services to all 700,000 of our residents and more than 58,000 business customers by the year 2020.

In conclusion, I am truly honored to be nominated for this position. I do not take lightly that the District is at a critical juncture for ensuring our affordable housing stock is code-compliant. We must manage this sacred responsibility while also ensuring our regulations do not limit the District's growth and ensure opportunities are open to all—including returning citizens, youth, victims of domestic violence, and long-time District residents opening a business and creating their own pathway to the middle class.

I am thrilled to be nominated for this position and bring my proven record to the agency. I am committed to finding and applying creative solutions to the complex problems within the

agency and the industry at large. Our agency decisions, under my leadership, will be based on meeting the needs of the District's residents, while striving to rebuild trust with our customers. I am honored to serve the District's residents, and to work closely with the Council and this Committee under the leadership of Mayor Bowser. This concludes my testimony. I am happy to address your questions at this time.