

Testimony to COW on the proposed Tax Revision Commission
September 30, 2020
By Katharine Landfield, MSW, LICSW

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and councilmembers. My name is Katharine Landfield and I live in Ward 3. As a former long-time school social worker deeply concerned about the well-being of working poor Black and brown families in DC, I have volunteered with Fair Budget Coalition, JUFJ, and PAVE, among other groups. I oppose the creation of a Tax Revision Commission and am urging the Council to create a new independent position within the Council Budget Office.

A years-long tax commission process is not meaningful, timely, or useful in addressing our dire mid-pandemic needs. Rather, we need more nimble responses to our revenue shortfall.

At this time, it is critical to find ways to have DC's highest income and wealthiest residents and businesses contribute more to the city's revenues. Specifically, I urge you to increase the income tax on the top 10% of earners in the District. My family is in that category, and we would like to pay more in income tax to support a truly equitable budget.

We are in a K-shaped recovery that has allowed the affluent of DC to remain comfortably secure during the pandemic as those in the bottom half of the income and wealth tables face – *right now* – significantly higher rates of unemployment, loss of wages, exposure to Covid illness and even death, and the subsequent inability to pay for rent, food, and medical care.

The Council needs to act fast to mitigate the worsening crisis of well-being for low-income Black and brown neighbors, a crisis which is significant and promises to be a long-term issue. After the Great Recession, business-as-usual policies resulted in drastic widening of the racial wealth and income gaps. There is every reason to think that this coming recovery will result in even worse outcomes and a slower return to pre-pandemic levels for these members of our city community. That is, unless we take an intentional approach to inclusion and just recovery, our city will only grow *more* divided and *less* equitable, and indeed already has.

I and many other high-income earners have profited in recent years from high real estate values, bullish stock markets, and the huge Trump tax cuts. Even before the pandemic, we knew that it was time for the city to ask more from us. But since the pandemic has locked my family down to work from our comfortable and well-resourced home in Ward 3, I have become even more acutely aware of the growing chasm between DC's haves and have nots.

Only attention to structural inequities, including our paltry expectations for the haves to contribute to the city's revenue, and massive investments in working-class Black and brown communities will help us to find our way out of this abysmal situation.

Thus far, the mayor and the Council have asked for no shared sacrifice from those who are most comfortable and safe. Yet we must pay our fair share. And please do not believe the howls that we cannot afford it; we most certainly can, with just a little of the careful planning that the working poor

put into their own personal budgeting. It is time to raise taxes on the highest income earners and the wealthy in order to ensure that our city becomes the truly inclusive and equitable city that we all profess to want.

Thank you.