

2/2/07
(February 2007)

Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
2136 Rayburn House Office Building
Capital Hill Office
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Norton,

My name is Debra G. Rowe and I am an employee of the District of Columbia Department of Health HIV/AIDS Administration. I currently serve as the Chief of Housing and the Department of Corrections Liaison. In this capacity I administer the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) Program which is funding by the Housing Urban and Development Administration (HUD).

I am writing to you today to request that you investigate what I deem as unethical practices being imposed upon me by a staff member of Councilmen David Catania's office and the Chief of Staff for my Director Dr. Gregg Pane. Specifically there are two District of Columbia clients who I will name Client A and Client B who Tori Whitley and Jennifer Mumford have in what I consider an abuse of power directed me to go against HOPWA Policies and Procedures and HUD Rules and Regulations to provide payments for their rent (Client A) and mortgage (Client B).

I and my former Senior Deputy Director, Dr. Marsha A. Martin have provided the Councilman's office a copy of the HUD Guidance around the use Short Term Rental Mortgage and Utility Assistance program (STRMU). Client B has come into our office for a case conference meeting and agreed to a long term housing plan that HUD requires us to facilitate on his behalf especially due to the fact that he is back again for the 5th year to receive STA assistance. Ms. Whitley has stated to me "that she has read the Guidance, and she does not care, I want this paid today". This client has received more than \$20,000 in mortgage payments and condo fees (which HUD does not allow for condo fees) over the last four years. The guidance is attached for your review. Please note the first paragraph on Page 1 were it states that "STRMU is not intended to provide continuous or perpetual assistance, and the regulations require that good faith efforts be undertaken to relocate clients to permanent affordable housing".

Numerous case managers under Us Helping Us, our Gatekeeper, Housing Counseling Services, former HOPWA directors and myself have worked to develop and implement a viable long-term solution for Client A that he has no interest in following through with because he knows that at the same time each year he can telephone Catania's office and have us strongly directed in a very ugly tone, with no regard for policies and procedures to "pay it now".

The client clearly cannot afford his mortgage and we have tried and tried to help him with a solution which is in accordance with the STRMU guidance. I was informed last year

by an exhausted Us Helping Us case manager that the client after receiving our 21 weeks of assistance goes to Catholic Charities, Bread for the City, and other agencies month after month to pay his mortgage. I have included for your review, the most recent turn of have us strongly directed in a very ugly tone, with no regard for policies and procedures to "pay it now".

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I feel compelled to provide you with a "partial view" of this client's payments:

Month/Year	Amount	Payee Type	Payment Source
January 2003	\$1,586.12	Mortgage	STRMU
February 2003	\$777.51	Mortgage	STRMU
March 2003	\$777.51	Mortgage	STRMU
January 2004	\$1,585.21	Mortgage	STRMU
April 2004	\$777.10	Mortgage	STRMU
April 2004	\$195.00	Condo Fee	STRMU
June 2004	\$416.00	Condo Fee	STRMU
June 2004	\$1,384.82	Mortgage	STRMU
March 2005	\$1,662.76	Mortgage	STRMU
March 2005	\$248.00	Condo Fee	STRMU
May 2005	\$1,614.20	Mortgage	STRMU
May 2005	\$248.00	Condo Fee	STRMU
June 2005	\$2,817.44	Mortgage Fee	STRMU
March 2006	\$3,219.40	Mortgage	STRMU
March 2006	\$850.00	Condo Fee	STRMU
June 2006	\$1,662.00	Mortgage	STRMU
November 2006	\$3,116.80	Mortgage	Contingency Fund

In fear of non-compliance with HUD, Dr. Martin proposed to the council that a contingency fund be set up utilizing DC Appropriated funds. Ms. Mumford and Ms. Whitley agreed to the fund, but not without negative responses and the contingency fund was named after Client A. The contingency fund is supposed to be accessed by clients who do not fit the criteria for the Ryan White Emergency Financial Assistance Program (EFA) or HOPWA STRMU. Please note that in November 2006, our community provider The DC CARE Consortium, much to their dismay, was directed by my Supervisor Gunther Freehill and Brenda Hicks to pay Client B \$3,116.80 out of the

Contingency Fund without so much as an application. I am almost certain that Mr. Freehill had to have come under pressure from Mr. Catania's office to do this. In addition, The June 2006 payment, according to our records was not approved by our Gatekeeper process.

Client A, who lives with a nationally known HIV advocate, telephoned our office last October and demanded that we pay his rent to this advocate, which is allowed, but again there are policies and procedures that are we are always cautious to abide by. The client could not produce certain documentation for the dollar amount of his request, and even though our provider was prepared to make the payment upon receipt of the documentation, Jennifer Mumford directed Unity Health Care to pay the amount from their Ryan White Title I funds under their Primary Medical Care Program in essence to make our office look bad for following protocol. She telephoned me at my desk and questioned me about the steps that Dr. Martin was taking to get the client paid and tried to encourage me to go against her and telephone Catania's office. She gave me the telephone number and told me that "his office was waiting for my call." Client A has telephoned and threatened whomever answers the telephone including our acting Chief of Staff Marie Sansone with what "Catania's office will do to them if he doesn't get what he wants that moment".

After the torrential turn of events that evolved regarding this client I encouraged Client A to get on the HOPWA waiting which has approximately 90-100 PWAs in waiting. During the week of January 9, I was called at home as I was on vacation and told that Client A was telephoning the agency and wanted to know (all of a sudden) what was his status on the waiting list because he wanted priority right now. I made telephone calls to the Gatekeeper on his behalf and inquired of his status. I was informed that he was number 44 on the list and would be moving that week to number 37 as seven (7) other clients were notified that they were coming off and about to receive their voucher subsidies. I was directed by Tori Whitley, indirectly and verbally of course, to move Client A to the top of the waiting list of HOPWA clients. This meant informing a client that was already notified, that he/she would not obtain their subsidy at that time. I was very disheartened by this dilemma, but in fear of retaliation, I began the steps to integrate Client A into the process. Fortunately another vacancy occurred during that week as another client moved into more permanent housing.

On Tuesday, January 30, I was called by Patrice Dickerson (DOH Governmental Affairs) (who has interceded to the best of her ability on my behalf) and asked to participate in a conference call with Tori Whitley and Jennifer Mumford. The both of them gave what felt like an inquisition of my handling the process for Client A. I was devastated after the call was over because of the tone of the discussion. I felt very disrespected and again hurt, that all of my hard work is overshadowed by these same two clients with these two (2) women who are in powerful positions. I am concerned that both of their actions are unethical and that their power is being imposed in a very abusive manner. I am certain that others can attest to this but right now I have to speak up for myself. They directed me to forego the TBRA process which is a part of policies and procedures for this program. I can provide these policies and procedures upon your request. When I

mentioned that another client had to be informed of losing his/her slot because of this, there was no comment or response from neither of them. I was directed on Tuesday for Client A to have his voucher by today! Again, it was a verbal telephone conversation but I am clear as to my orders even though I was very distraught at the way I was being talked to.

I facilitate a monthly mandatory HOPWA provider meeting every third Thursday of the month and I personally invited Ms. Whitley to attend to try and better the relationship and further inform her of our process. She never came. In addition, I was called down to council chambers last spring and questioned for nearly three (3) hours by Ms. Whitley about the program. She is stuck on the fact the HOPWA may have 2-3 million dollars left on the fiscal books at the end of a program year, but as I have explained over and over to her we not only receive funding for the District of Columbia, we are the Administrative Agent for Suburban Maryland, Northern Virginia, and West Virginia who under spend each year. The District spends its HOPWA dollars! I also explained during that inquisition that I had to reconcile all of FY2002, 2003, 2004 and the first quarter 2005 before I would touch any unspent dollars. To that she replied "I think that you are being overly conservative with your spending" Of course I could not state what I was thinking but I had to wonder does the District want fiscal responsibility from its managers or not? Please take a look at the City Council's FY07 Budget Support Act mandate for the HOPWA program as it is directly related to this concern.

Congresswoman Norton I am pleading with you to look into this matter. I was at home grieving for my deceased mother whom I had just buried in October 2004 when a former Senior Deputy Director telephoned me and asked me to oversee the HOPWA program. The program was in danger of being de-obligated of nearly \$27 million dollars due to under spending, lack of reconciliation of expenditures and other issues, concerns, HUD audit findings, etc. I came right in a week later spent time thoroughly assessing the problems, and worked diligently to turn all of that around. I can confidently state that although the program is not yet perfect, our project officers at HUD are more pleased than they have been in years with my progress. I must note that I was treated very unfairly during this time as I was not compensated for the position until April 2006 when they made me apply for the job and take MSS status.


I also work diligently on behalf of inmates and ex-offenders as the Department of Corrections (DOC) Liaison. I facilitated on the behalf of our agency and DOC the "Automatic HIV screening" that is being implemented at the D. C. Jail. I also serve as the Chair of the Comprehensive Continuity of Care Committee for the correctional healthcare of all D.C. inmates including those who are in the Federal institutions. You see, I am an ex-offender from 1991 who has worked hard to improve my life and help as many PWAs inmates, women and children, Transgenders, and all. I went back to school as a widow raising three (3) children and received my Masters Degree in Human Services in 1997. In addition, I have been the legal guardian of an eight (8) year old little boy whose parents were incarcerated living with HIV disease (without receiving a dime of government assistance in order to keep him out of the system), so I take great offense to these women questioning my commitment and/or passion to serve the PWA population. I

did not have the privilege of "its who you know" such as these two women. Under the mentorship of the late Gertrude T. Hunter a pioneer in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the District, who took me under her wing when I first was released, I worked my way up and I have served under four (4) Senior Deputy Directors at HAA working hard to serve the Faith Community, Inmates/Ex-offenders, Adolescents/Young Adults and Substance Abusers single handed as no one at the agency was willing to work with these populations.

I now fear for my job, but I cannot in good conscience not report these practices that are unfair to other persons who are in need. Of course I want to assist these clients, I know one of them personally, but I cannot allow favor to those that I know over someone in dire need such as the people on the waiting list. We have successfully decreased our list and everyone on there now is new and has been waiting no more than of less than a year. I fear for my job because the tone of all of the discussions that I have had with these women and I do not feel that I have the support that I need from the agency as everyone is new and "everybody knows or are tied in someway to each other" (even up to the councilman's office). When I inquired as to how to access the Whistleblower Protection Act, information was given that I should telephone our Call Center and tell them the concerns so that I could be directed to the appropriated person. Well, Ms. Mumford's tenant manages our Call Center, so I certainly could not do that.

I am not intentionally bypassing the Mayor in this process. I am just taking into consideration that he is new in his position and pre-occupied with many other matters and I urgently need assistance as both Client A and Client B are requesting priority assistance at this time. I would be happy to provide you with any documentation that you may need. Again, I beseech you to look into this matter not just for me, but on behalf of all of the prospective and current clients who look to us to serve them in a fair and appropriate manner.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this matter,


Ms. Debra G. Rowe, M.H.S.
Chief of Housing Programs/DOC Liaison

Cc: Vincent Gray, Chair- DC City Council
Honorable Mayor Adrian Fenty
Honorable Albert R. Wynn
Councilman David Catania
Councilman Jim Graham
Councilman Harry Thomas
Councilman Phil Mendelson
Councilman Marion Barry
Councilman Kwame Brown

Francis Bush, Director of Community Development, HUD
Donna Clarke, Project Officer, HUD

Office of the Inspector General
Office of the State Attorney
Dr. Gregg Pane, Director, DOH
Marie Sansone, Acting Chief of Staff, HAA
Julia Hudson, Chief of Staff-Congresswoman Norton's Office

Enclosures: STRMU Guidance
TBRA Policies and Procedures
Resume for Debra G. Rowe
Email documentation regarding Client B (includes waiver that I was
directed to approve)
Email documentation regarding Client A