



**March 8, 2024**

## **Written Comments for the 2023 Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report**

HopePHL appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony to the City's Division of Housing and Community Development on the 2022-2023 Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report Year. **Most importantly, from everyone at HopePHL, we want to thank the city for its substantial support over the years.**

HopePHL™ (pronounced "hopeful") was founded through an integration of two human service organizations in Philadelphia, PA: People's Emergency Center (PEC) and Youth Service, Inc (YSI). HopePHL's mission is to inspire Philadelphia's children, youth, families and communities to thrive by providing housing, advocacy, and trauma-responsive social services designed to promote equity, resilience, autonomy, and well-being.

We believe that the current annual and five-year Consolidated Housing Plan has demonstrated success, except in cases where the activities related to the desired outcomes are not receiving adequate funding. We respectfully submit the following feedback:

### **1. The city should examine the way they evaluate homelessness among families and children to measure housing demand with supply.**

HOPEPHL suggests a new evaluation to determine if the demand for the types of housing offered to families experiencing homelessness is adequate. Specifically, that includes emergency, transitional, rapid rehousing, and supportive housing. HopePHL is concerned that the trend since 2017 of diminishing housing capacity for homeless families results in them seeking services anywhere else except the homeless housing system. If families are not contacting the centralized intake for assistance, it is extremely difficult to determine the extent of the need both for planning purposes and for directly responding to homelessness.

Housing options for homeless families will decrease again this year, as the Continuum of Care system is not renewing 11 contracts, of which at least seven support serving families. Based on currently known demographic data, these programs overwhelmingly serve families of color with young children. According to the latest funding report, the Continuum is eliminating 147 units of transitional housing and seven units of permanent supportive housing for families that cost on average \$14,011 per unit. Also from that report, the Continuum has added 84 units of rapid rehousing at a cost of \$29,241 per unit. In short, fewer units, higher costs, and families undoubtedly falling through the gaps in the safety net.

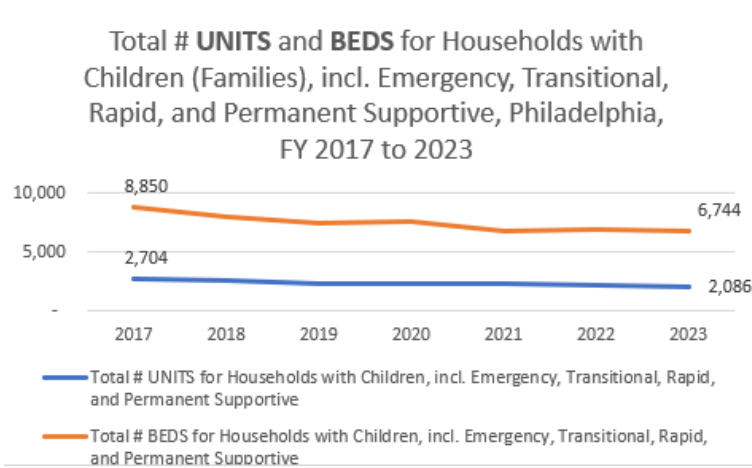


Figure 1 - Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

**2. HopePHL encourages DHCD to continue supporting homelessness prevention strategies by expanding resources.**

We have been able to leverage the City’s investment in our Prevention and Diversion program with funding from Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and private foundations to expand our services, but we still have over 2,000 applicants waiting. There is a need for funds for the assistance as well as staff to manage cases and negotiate with landlords. We are unable to take in any more applications because our resources are not at the level necessary to support everyone. The City’s prevention strategies, which feature the anti-eviction laws approved in the past few years, have succeeded in slowing down the numbers of families entering the homeless housing system. However, financial support for prevention support has not kept up with demand.

**3. We ask the city to prioritize creating and preserving affordable rental housing.**

Estimates are that Philadelphia needs an additional 70,000 units of affordable housing to meet demand, while at the same time faces the possible loss of thousands of existing units over the next decade due to for profit developers exiting the low-income housing system. At the same time, our city continues to deal with an unacceptable amount of homelessness and deep poverty. As the CAPER report demonstrates we continue to struggle with meeting our targets to address even a portion of these needs. The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency has created a new funding vehicle for Low Income Housing Tax Credit developments supported by a health sector entity. Therefore, we urge the Administration to take this opportunity to lead by example and create a detailed plan to develop more units of deeply affordable housing – particularly that which serves people experiencing homelessness – and to call on institutions across the city to join the effort.

HopePHL has more than 190 units of affordable rental housing currently, with 40 more units in development. We have 55 current units targeted for preservation work. **We are grateful to the city, the state, and Philadelphia Housing Authority for their support of these homes.**

**4. We propose that the administration secure \$7.5 million in multi-year investments to support the stability of the Community Development Corporations that are the front line of services in neighborhoods with high needs and few resources.**

We value safe, clean, and green Philadelphia neighborhoods and CDCs are critical to achieving these goals. Moreover, the network of CDCs provides critical services, revitalizes and stabilizes



neighborhoods, and produces systems-level solutions at the community level. For example, HopePHL is one of several providers offering tangled title assistance as part of a pilot program under DHCD's Neighborhood Advisory Committee programs.

Maintaining and growing flexible public and private multi-year support will enable CDCs to continue to deliver core services in a way that advances equity, including enabling local residents and businesses to build generational wealth, building and preserving affordable homes to advance self-sufficiency, advancing economic opportunity by supporting and growing local businesses and commercial corridors, creating safe, green and clean streetscapes, and elevating community voices while maintaining organizational stability and enabling long-term planning to facilitate investments that are beneficial to the community.

**5. The City should create and capitalize a Property Acquisition Fund managed by a Community Development Financial Institution with an initial \$20 million investment that allows trusted nonprofits to acquire properties quickly and strategically and cover predevelopment costs for affordable housing or community beneficial use.**

By helping mission-driven nonprofits buy listed properties, in particular single-family homes, now purchased in bulk to transform into permanent rentals at increased rents, the city has an opportunity to preserve affordability, provide stable housing, increase homeownership, and improve property maintenance.

**6. We urge the city to evaluate and improve the Philadelphia Land Bank by engaging with the CDC community to ensure the Bank is meeting the needs of Philadelphia's neighborhoods.**

This land, held in public ownership, is a key resource for accomplishing our shared housing and development goals, and an effective, efficient, predictable, transparent, and accountable Land Bank is critical to making those goals a reality. However, as of this testimony there has been no engagement with nonprofit developers on the changes needed to get the Land Bank fully functional.

Thank you for calling for public testimony, and for inviting our representative to testify. We are grateful for the City's support and look forward to partnering with the city in the future – for as long as it takes to ensure that the experience of homelessness is truly rare, brief, and non-recurring for everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kathy Desmond".

Kathy Desmond  
President & CEO