Good morning, Chairperson Nadeau and Members of the Committee on Human Services. I am a District resident, a relative caregiver, and a proud member of the DC KinCare Alliance Community Board. I took in my four younger siblings when our mother had a mental health breakdown a few years ago and I still care for three of them.

I have a Family Rehousing and Stabilization Program voucher, more commonly known as a Rapid Rehousing voucher. I have had difficulty with the Rapid Rehousing program from the start. I have had terrible problems with a lack of working air conditioning, water leaks and mold, an infestation of mice, and a disrespectful landlord. The worst problem I have experienced, by far, is the repeated and ongoing gun violence right outside my apartment.

My next-door neighbors are in a gang war leading to the outside of my building being shot up on a regular basis. I am terrified that my younger siblings or I will be shot when we step outside, or even hit by a stray bullet indoors. My worst fears came true when my adult sister, Emoni, was shot in the neck on my front doorstep, right after dropping off our three younger siblings. Emoni was hospitalized but survived. Later, my cousin was shot in my neighborhood while walking toward my apartment. Just last week, my younger brother, Yves, had two friends waiting outside our apartment for him. While they were standing out front doing nothing wrong, men drove up and started shooting. Both of my brother’s friends were hit. One died and one is in the hospital. Yves was looking for his keys when this happened. If he had been able to find his keys just a few minutes sooner, he might be dead right now.

I requested a relocation due to my sister, Emoni, getting shot; however, DHS said no because Emoni didn’t live with us. Only after nine months and the help of a lawyer at the Equal Rights
Center, did DHS finally agree to allow us to move. Unfortunately, the DHS agreement turned out to be worth nothing. I spent SO much time finding a rent reasonable house. I applied and was approved by four different landlords, but when it came time to schedule the lease up, the landlords all backed out because Ms. Theresa Meade, my housing coordinator at Echelon, which is my community provider, Ms. Temprest Middleton at The Community Partnership, and Mr. Darrell Cason at DHS would not commit to paying the Rapid Rehousing portion of the rent for the year lease. In fact, they would not commit to paying the Rapid Rehousing portion for any time at all. It boiled down to them saying that yes, I have a Rapid Rehousing voucher and no, they won't commit to funding it. It's just supposed to be a rent payment guessing game from month to month.

I have been told by my caseworker, Jenny Shin, at Echelon that I qualify for a Permanent Supportive Housing voucher and that she is working to get me matched with one, but I have been hearing from her since last fall that my name never comes up at the DHS Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement meetings. I know that I am not the only person with a FRSP voucher who was supposed to get a PSH voucher and hasn’t. My lawyers at DC KinCare Alliance showed me a Washington City Paper article that talked about people who have had the exact same problems with Rapid Rehousing that I have.

I am asking today that you take a hard look at the Rapid Rehousing program because it is failing the people who are in it, and, I am asking you to make sure that there is enough money for PSH vouchers so that District residents like me who are eligible can actually get one. I shouldn’t have to worry about my family and me dying from gun violence every day because DHS won’t let us move. Thank you for listening to me and I am happy to answer any questions.