

Written Testimony of Cheryl Brunson
Brookland Manor Tenants' Association and the Washington D.C. Poor People's
Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

Before the House Appropriations Committee,
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
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Rayburn House Office Building

Hello, my name is Cheryl Brunson. I'm with the tenants' association at Brookland Manor in Ward 5 of Washington, DC and the DC Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

I was born and raised in Washington, DC. I raised my 3 beautiful children in Washington, DC in Brookland Manor. I'm a single mother that loves my DC community. Now, I'm raising my 3 grandchildren here too. I would love them to grow up here in DC. That is why I fight. My neighborhood is my community. Where I am raising my children and grandchildren in my community, I can pick up my grandchildren's asthma medication, Metro and food. In my community, there is still a little sea of families and we stick together, but since the developers have been coming into the community, they have changed the atmosphere. Our children are pawns in their game.

The poverty I experienced as a child – and what I see today – isn't the fault of any single person, but a system that has decided that me, my children, and my community don't matter – and you are all responsible for keeping that system going. Nobody is standing up for us, except us, and that's not how a democracy, a government, of, by and for the people, is supposed to work. We need to address child poverty, and we must recognize that poor children come from poor families and communities: addressing child poverty means also addressing the poverty that their parents, neighbors, and community are facing.

Our children are growing up with insecure housing, their parents are in insecure jobs, and their future is held in insecure and failing schools. Developers are throwing us out of our Community, jailing us in our neighborhood & the legislators are letting it happen. Developers make part of my neighborhood private and other parts remain public. But the lines are often confusing and people don't know where they can legally walk. If residents are seen walking on property deemed private, they will get a bar notice and some of those lead to evictions. We can't even sit on our front porch to get fresh air or take a walk for exercise without being harassed. People who've lived in Brookland Manor 10, 20 even 30 years are being given little to no notice to leave like this isn't our home and we're not human.

At her school, my grandchild is getting bullied by her teacher. Her teacher has lost her homework and gave her a "C" because he lost it. He has told my grandchild that, "I'm going to stop you from getting to the 7th grade." There are no programs for our youth. All

the schools need is some funding. We need to put money in afterschool programs, but we can't count on her teacher or these schools to take care of our kids.

The only thing we can count on is that there is a police presence all the time, patrolling our communities, locking up our kids and loved ones, and telling us that we are the problem, instead of taking on the real problems of systemic racism and poverty and inadequate schools. The police need to stop harassing our children on the way to school. The police are busy arresting the children for leaning on a fence or standing on the sidewalk in front of their own building, because that sidewalk is now private property. Meanwhile parents are working as hard as they can, doing the best with what they have, sometimes working 2 or 3 jobs.

Our kids are being set up. I've been in Brookland Manor 31 + years and what's happening in my community breaks my heart.

But, Brookland Manor has generations and generations of families & we will fight. We will fight for ourselves, for our children, and their children, because we know what we are worth and what you all are throwing away.

Child poverty costs this country more than \$1 trillion per year in lost productivity, increased health and crime cost, and increased costs from homelessness and maltreatment. This didn't just happen overnight. Government assistance for poor families and children has been going down for decades, while our tax dollars are going to support corporate welfare and military spending – instead of schools, social welfare programs that make sure we have heat, water, and food, and public housing that is affordable and safe – while the wealthy are having their taxes cut! Head Start, which has served 36 million children and their families since 1965 is consistently underfunded, but we need more programs like that, that are focused on our children and rely on the maximum feasible participation of their families to make sure these programs work for us.

We know that if we have more programs like that, we can realize all of the gifts and talents of our community. For every \$1 invested in early children education, our society would gain more than \$7, and if we brought all of our kids up to the basic achievement on standardized tests, we could grow our economy \$32 trillion over the long-term. This isn't too much to ask for – you can raise a tiny tax on Wall Street, you can restore the corporate tax, you can decide to fund education instead of the wall at the US-Mexico border, you can decide to cut the military budget by 1% and move those funds over to Head Start or fund SNAP at a higher meal standard and more. I will fight for my community, but this is your responsibility, and we expect you to do more, for Brookland Manor, DC, and the rest of the country.

Appendix A: Costs of Poverty Fact Sheet
Appendix B: Washington D.C. Poverty Fact Sheet
Appendix C: Child, Youth Student Fact Sheet