Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the Committee on Executive Administration & Labor. My name is Winnie Huston and I am the Food Policy Strategist for DC Greens, where we work to advance health equity by building a just and resilient food system.

For the past three years, a large part of my focus has been on sounding the alarm about the high rate of senior food insecurity in the District and working on systemic solutions. The latest data on The State of Senior Hunger in America shows that DC continues to have the highest senior food insecurity rate among US states at 13.1%, an increase from 9.6% in 2016. This means that approximately 12,000 seniors lack consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. I’m pleased that this Committee led the Council effort to pass the No Senior Hungry Omnibus Amendment Act of 2021 (NSH). This bill is the first step in a holistic approach to addressing the food insecurity crisis facing thousands of District seniors. While NSH is not a panacea, it will develop a city-wide response to this problem that coordinates between agencies and private sector service providers, maximizes the effectiveness and reach of services, uses all available resources to communicate with isolated seniors, and increases senior participation in federally funded food programs. On behalf of hungry seniors, I am calling on this Committee to again lead by working with your colleagues on the Committee on Human Services and the Committee of the Whole to find the funds required to implement this important piece of legislation. The Mayor's proposed FY24 budget abrogates her responsibility to protect the lives and safety of seniors by failing to fund the budgets of the Department of Aging & Community Living (DACL), the Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) at the levels required to address senior food insecurity.

The Fiscal Impact Statement for the NSH Legislation states that $1.6 million in local funds are needed in the first year of implementation of the bill (DACL: $732,000, DHS: $850,000, OSSE: $15,000), however, the actual costs are somewhat lower given that the DACL has already contracted with the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger to analyze data on the root causes of senior food insecurity in DC and the DHS is
months away from implementing the Elderly Simplified Application Program which will begin to simplify the application process for seniors to receive SNAP benefits.

I applaud DACL and DHS for moving forward to implement these and other important initiatives, however, without additional funding neither DACL, DHS, or OSSE can fulfill its duties under NSH to coordinate resources across agencies, simplify government processes, provide better communication to seniors who are not currently using available food services, and increase senior participation in federally funded food programs.

Seniors are suffering, Madam Chair, and the Mayor’s FY24 Fairshot Budget with its focus on pre-pandemic funding levels for food assistance programs, transportation assistance, housing support, and other human service programs will not ease that suffering. The cost of living in the District has risen by more than 10% since the onset of the pandemic. Pre-pandemic funding levels will only cause more seniors to go hungry, strain our already struggling emergency food assistance programs, decrease senior health, and prevent the City from maximizing federally funded food programs.

Madam Chair, I am asking you and this Committee to again step up and be the hero that our food insecure seniors need. Please work with your colleagues to find funding to implement the NSH legislation.