

# VAN NESS SOUTH TENANTS ASSOCIATION

December 14, 2017

Mayor Muriel Bowser  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

I am contacting you for the third time to request that you take strong action on the rent “concessions” issue, a scam used by major landlords to circumvent the DC rent stabilization law and consequently overcharge DC residents by what likely is tens of millions of dollars. The Attorney General’s announcement yesterday that he is filing suit against Equity Residential for this practice substantiate the claims I have made to your administration over many months.

My renewed request today follows our one-on-one discussion after the ANC-3 meeting on Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>, my letter to you on Oct. 19 and my follow-up letter with additional documentation to you on Oct. 21, which was cc’ed to your key housing and members of your staff. It also follows many emails cc’ed to those officials and also to your previous Rent Administrator that were written to Equity Residential on behalf of tenants fighting to escape predatory rent increases and to assert their legal rights. Since we spoke on Oct. 17<sup>th</sup> I have received no acknowledgement from your administration whatsoever.

As the months pass, more and more of your constituents are ensnared in the “concessions” scam, which costs each one of them hundreds of dollars a year at best and well over one thousand annually at worst. This should trigger urgent action on behalf of your administration, but to my knowledge action has yet been taken.

High-level officials in your administration have turned a blind eye to this predatory practice. The current and former head of the Rental Administration Division and director of the Department of Housing and Community Development have long been aware that major landlords are submitting false rent filings to the RAD and using these false filings as the basis for subsequent rent increases. Because the RAD and DHCD have failed to investigate these filings, I submitted FOIA requests for the legally-mandated records. These reveal that at least one major landlord, Equity Residential, frequently claims under penalty of perjury that the “rents” it collects apartments are as much as \$1,500 per month above the going market price.

At the Oct. 17 ANC meeting I specifically asked you during the Q&A if you would instruct the DHCD to investigate false filings by major DC landlords. You stated at the time that you would need to gather more information from your department heads, but almost two months have passed and I have received no response to my request.

I believe that use of the “concession” scam is not confined to Equity Residential. Month after month, more and more DC residents become ensnared by the “concessions” scam. This likely costs them thousands of dollars each, and the cost to DC residents as a whole likely is in the tens of millions of dollars.

The evidence to find out whether this predatory practice extends beyond Equity Residential is already filed at your DHCD. I have FOIA’ed some of this material, but the matter could be greatly expedited if your administration were to take action on this issue.

To be clear, it is likely that “concession” leases are a widespread problem. If so, this predatory practice not only does substantial harm to the individual tenants, but also drives up the cost of housing overall. The failure to bring this practice to a halt undermines goals to make housing in the District more affordable.

For these reasons, I renew my request for you to direct members of your administration, specifically the DHCD and RAD, to investigate the false rent filings that become the basis for illegal rent increases. I also ask that you use every tool at your disposal to make DC residents aware of the rent “concessions” scam, and to work forcefully to protect tenants’ rights under the law and to help making housing more affordable.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harry Gural', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Harry Gural  
President, Van Ness South Tenants Association  
Founder, Fair Rent DC

cc: Members of the Van Ness South Tenants Association, Members of Fair Rent DC