



**Testimony to the Committee on Facilities and Procurement  
Oversight of the Department of General Services  
Thursday, February 28, 2019**

Good Morning Councilmember White and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rebecca Miller and I am the Executive Director of the DC Preservation League (DCPL), Washington's only citywide nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to the preservation and protection of the historic resources of our nation's capital.

We have testified repeatedly before this committee during oversight and budget hearings on issues related to the lack of maintenance of District owned properties. I come before you again today to outline minor improvements we have seen over the past year and highlight critical issues that remain unaddressed and seemingly disregarded.

Lack of property maintenance or demolition by neglect is a major issue that affects Washington's historic landmarks and neighborhoods, one that is being perpetrated not only by individual property owners, but also by the District Government that is obligated to enforce property maintenance laws. DC's local ordinance recognizes the harms of ignoring the necessary maintenance of buildings and attempts to curb demolition by neglect on the part of private owners through substantial fines and other penalties (when enforced), but the Government seems to be disinclined to live up to those same standards itself for property it owns. With no one holding local government agencies responsible for deferred maintenance, the problem is obvious.

DCPL met with DGS leadership two years ago for a productive discussion of our concerns regarding several historic properties and came away understanding two distinct problems exist in DC that demand immediate attention:

- 1) Inadequate holding funds for historic properties. All buildings have holding costs – including general maintenance (roofs, windows, doors, gutters, etc.). District owned buildings like the Franklin School (now under redevelopment) have not had sufficient DC funds allocated for required and necessary maintenance for many years.
- 2) Lack of a simple inspection or maintenance schedule. DGS informed us that no one person or department is responsible to inspect District- owned vacant buildings to confirm the existence of maintenance issues or emergencies. For example, there was no record or knowledge of the date someone had physically inspected the interior of the historic Recorder of Deeds building at 5<sup>th</sup> and D Streets, NW. Maintenance issues are now always apparent from the exterior of the building. Issues such as a leaking roof, unless viewed from the air or a neighboring taller building, often go unnoticed and

could cause irreparable damage to a building's interior, substantially increasing the cost of rehabilitation and reuse.

We urge the Council to take affirmative action to address these pressing issues with the Department of General Services to effectively by (1) taking the lead in identifying accountable departments, (2) setting long overdue inspection and maintenance goals and benchmarks, and (3) establishing quality control measures to ensure these goals are achieved effectively and efficiently.

This is a city-wide problem, but I come today before your committee because the Department of General Services currently has a large number of neglected historic properties in its portfolio. Tasked with managing DC's real estate to achieve its highest and best use, DGS is missing the mark when it comes to the city's historic landmarks and assets, resulting in further (although perhaps unintentional) demolition of its historic resources by neglectful management. The city is, in short, setting a poor example for the treatment of historic buildings within its portfolio. This problem has persisted for too long without action.

It is imperative that the Mayor and Council allocate adequate funding for the staff and resources necessary to ensure timely maintenance for all District-owned historic properties. Additional funding is also needed to address the backlog of deferred maintenance on some of the city's most cherished landmarks. Continued inaction will further jeopardize the future viability and potential reuse of Washington's many valuable historic resources.

DCPL will be meeting with Director Anderson next week to discuss these issues and how we can assist the agency in protecting the city's publicly owned historic resources from further deterioration and neglect.