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Dear Committee on Housing, Neighborhood Development, and the Homeless:

Good afternoon, my name is Ms. Delores Bell. I'm a Section 8 tenant currently living in Frankford. I'm here today as a member of Renters United Philadelphia and as someone who believes that all tenants deserve to be treated fairly. Thank you for inviting me to share my story about how difficult it is for voucher holders to find housing in Philadelphia.

I have lived at my current apartment for nearly four years. But I want to move for two reasons. First, my parents are getting older, and they need someone to look after them. They live in Germantown, and I would like to move to an apartment closer to them so that I can help them out when they need it. Second, it is my dream to be a foster parent. I have 10 grandchildren, and I believe that children need guidance and all the love they deserve. I want to provide this guidance and love as a foster parent but my current apartment is too small. To host a foster child long-term, I need a two-bedroom apartment.

But finding an apartment where I can use a voucher is very hard in Philadelphia. I've searched online for a two-bedroom apartment in Germantown, and I see there are plenty of options. But many of the apartments are too expensive and won't be covered by the voucher. I wish the voucher would cover higher rents because that would make it easier to find housing. And once you look at the apartments that are in the voucher price range, most of them won't accept vouchers. I've called ten to twenty places! And they've all told me they don't accept vouchers. I'm a good tenant. I have references and photos to show that I've always kept my apartment in good condition, and I've always paid my rent on time. But I don't even get the chance to prove that I'm a good tenant when landlords flat-out refuse to accept voucher holders. It's hurtful to be stereotyped like this.

It doesn't have to be this hard. In North Carolina, where I lived before, it was much easier to find a good apartment with a voucher. And the Housing Authority assisted voucher holders through the process. They even provided a list of places that accepted Section 8. And, the homes available in North Carolina are clean and nice places. If I didn't have to care for my parents here, I would move back to North Carolina.

The city needs to take action and to listen to the tenants who testify here today. We're not being treated fairly by the landlords who refuse to even consider our applications just because we have vouchers. I want to find a place where I can care for my parents and a foster child, but I need to find a landlord who will accept my voucher first. It shouldn't be this hard. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Delores Bell